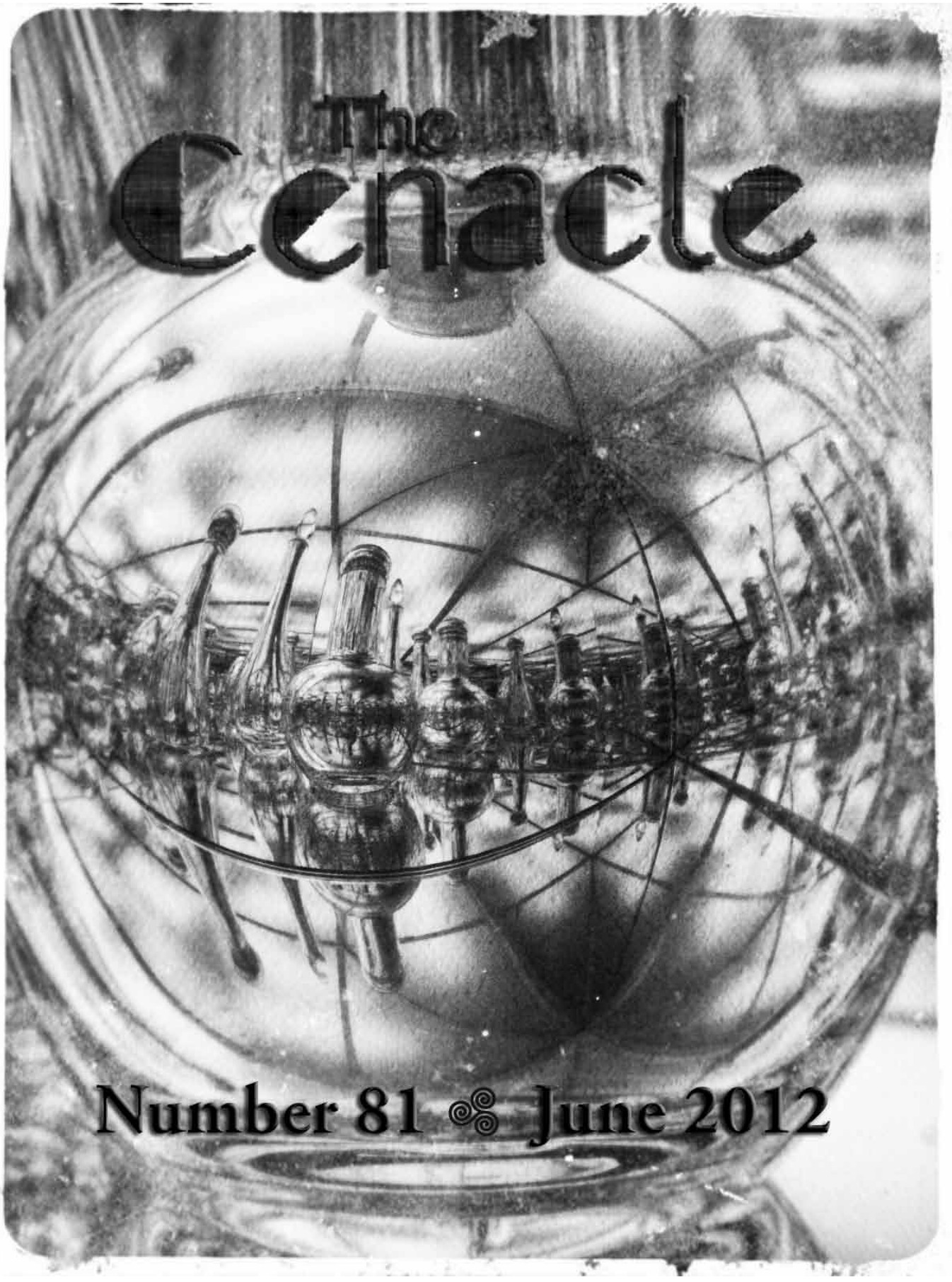



Number 81 ☘ June 2012

There is that older than
my paths & songs, roots dangling for
a hold. There are liners in those skies
tonight, tomorrow, beckoning for a ride,
maybe just for a song.

June 23, 2012
11:37 p.m.
Harvard Square
Au Bon Pain Cafe [courtyard-ish table]
Cambridge, MA

I speak to the freak. I think there are a lot of us around. I think I even know why.

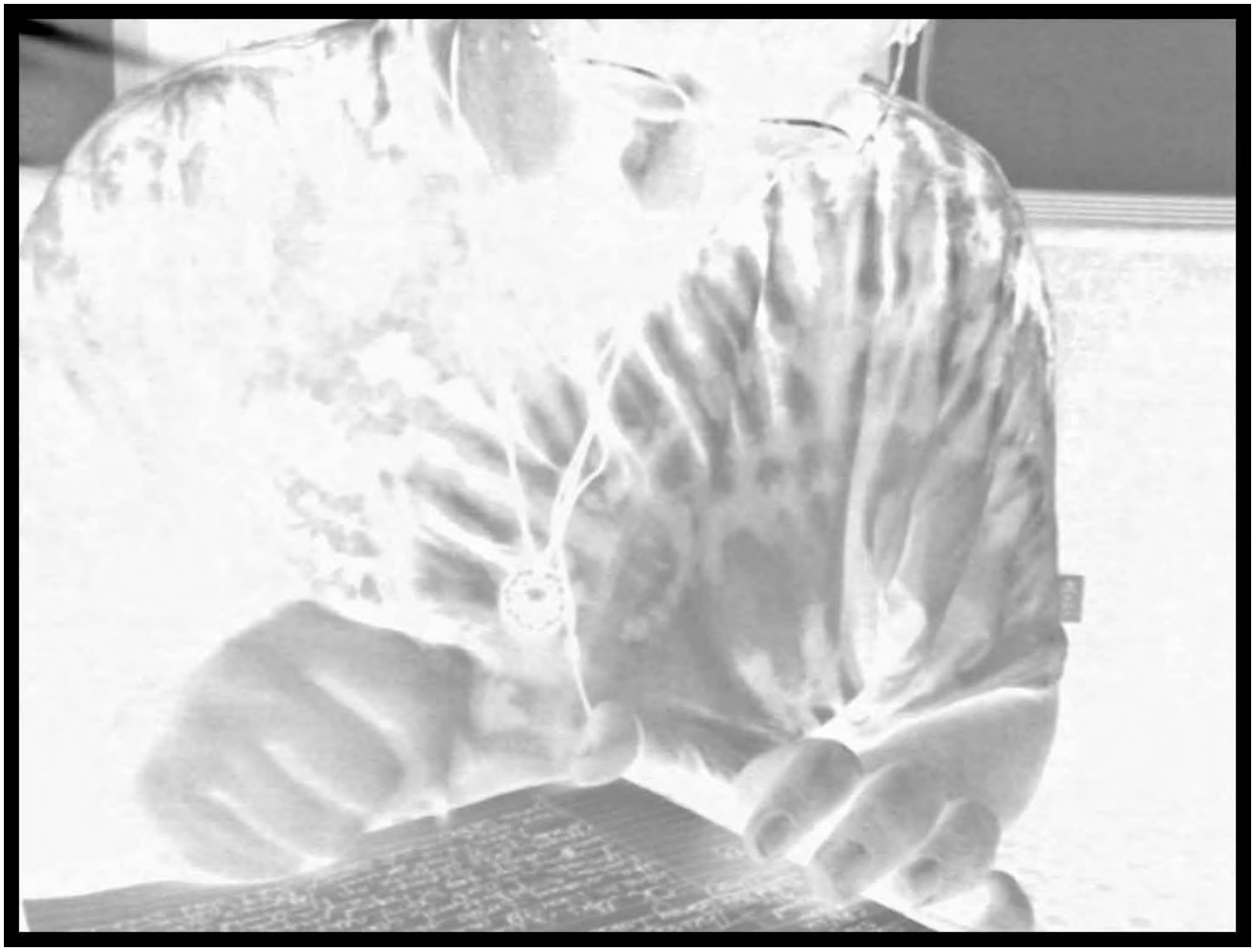
You. The freak. You're restless, dissatisfied, agitated. You wonder why. And you wonder why. And still you wonder why.

You. The freak. You love too, you love a lot, & not always easily, or in ways easy to explain. To others. Even to yourself. Maybe especially.

The instructions you were given— what to do to become happy, liked, successful— was there something wrong with them? Something missing? Do they still apply these days? Is there an expiration date? What's wrong with them? What's wrong with you?

What's wrong? With you? With me? With all of us? You wonder.

I am wondering too. I cannot



say that we, you & I, share every dissatisfaction, with ourselves, with those around us, the world at large.

I can say to you, the freak, that you are not alone. You are not even scarce. There are billions of dissatisfied souls on this planet tonight, & I would wager that the smaller number of happy ones are not all residing in seats of power. I wager that easy.

But mere dissatisfaction does not a freak make, not by my use of the word. No, this is not about the fatness of your wallet, the size of your tits or cock, where you stand in your family or social circle.

No, I speak to you, the freak, if you keep putting your nose above the level of the head around you & sniffing wrong. It smells wrong. Worse than a predator, or a drought, or bodily sickness, it smells wrong.

What has gotten us this far as a race isn't going to take us on perpetually. Most of us know that, & keep our noses down, remember

those familiar rules for success even if they don't work so well, or anyway feel right anymore - keep noses & faces & everything else down & look close to something warm & known.

Until it doesn't work. You, freak, you know what they're going through, the denial about everything being alright - because if we can put a man on the moon, we can save our own planet, right?

Right?

Freak, there are a lot of us & maybe even a lot more coming, sniffing wildly even when they don't put their noses too far out.

And, freak, you know we don't have easy answers. Untangling all this is not merely a matter of will or money. We are deeply jacked into what is killing our world & rendering more of us freaks all the time.

So you, freak-to-be, freak-in-waiting, freaking reluctant, don't push away from the dwindling table of plenty assuming there must be more elsewhere. Surely the freaks know, they're always

singing & dancing

No, we don't. We have ideas that would work on a small-scale, in tribal communities, pre-capitalist, pre-Christian, pre-now

Freak, I'll say again, be ready for more numbers coming. Leaders don't even talk of peace anymore. We have little, we don't know how, but more are coming.

But, see, here's my idea. Maybe that's a good thing. Maybe the freak populace has to become a fucking epidemic. An impoverished, have nothing, will share it though, singing, dancing epidemic—

Maybe that's the only way out, dread, whatever, freak. You don't know, I don't know, here they come by the millions. Alright, spread out there on the floor. Alright, there's bread, there's something. There's singing, there's dancing. There's breathing as long as there's one of us & at least one tree. Alright then.

6-23-2012

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New England
2012

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Accompanying disk to print version contains:

- *Cenacles* #47-81
- Burning Man Books #1-66
- *Scriptor Press Sampler* #1-13
- *RaiBooks* #1-7
- RS Mixes from "Within's Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution"; &
- Jellicle Literary Guild Highlights Series

Disk contents downloadable at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/cenacle/supplementary_disk.zip

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Thank you to my now ex-colleagues at UBH, your loyalty & good fellowship made a decent job even better . . . thank you to my new friends & collaborators at Occupy Boston Radio (http://obr.fm) for taking the spirit of Occupy & applying it to a really good project!

**Jeremy Kilar**

*Joe Coleman*

# Dolores Toodle goes to Market

"Goodness gracious. Mercy me!
I'm all out of sugar and have little tea.
My milk and cookies are getting' low . . .
'Tis off to the market I go."

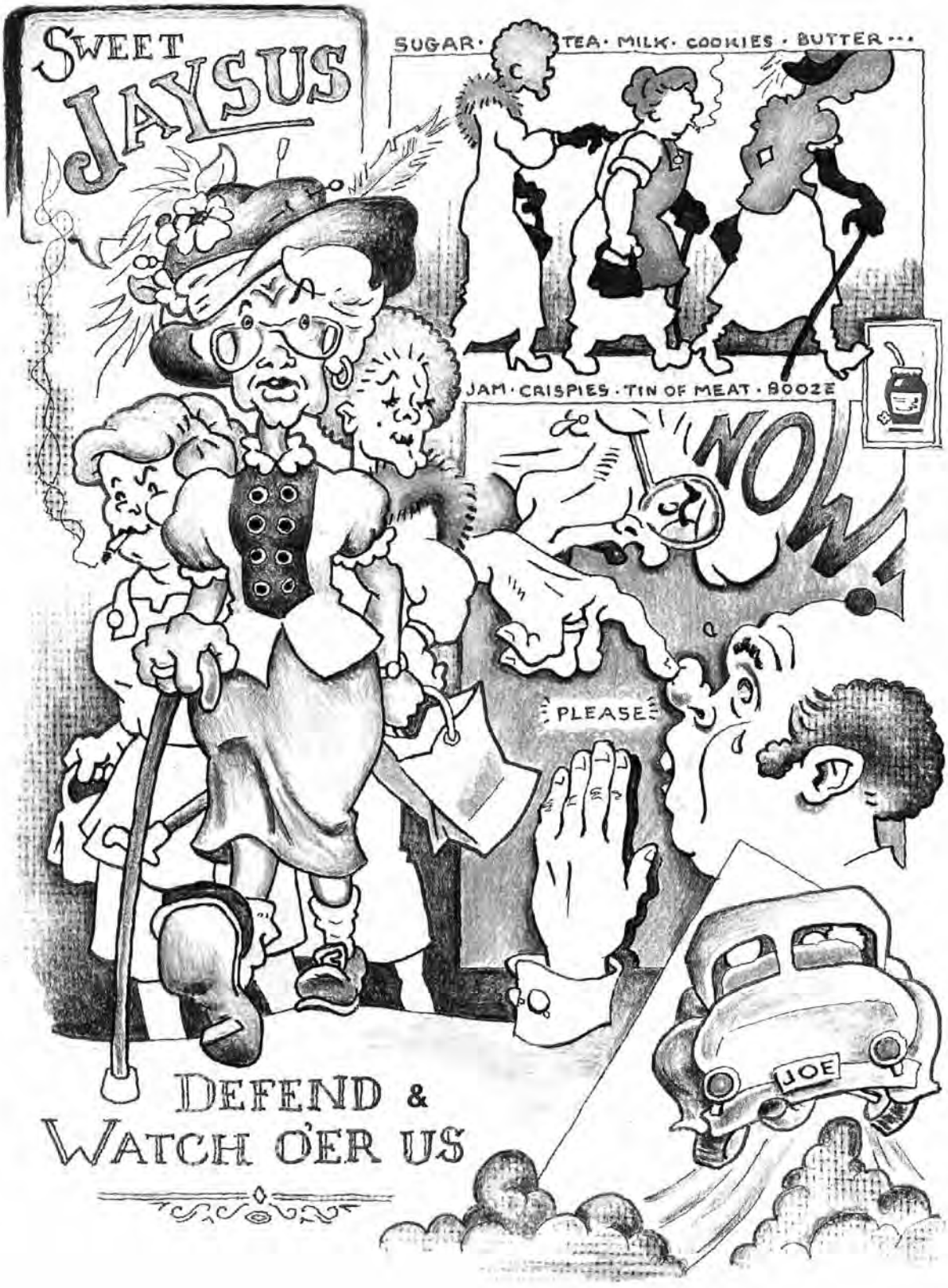
So Dolores Toodle pulled up her stockings,
put on her bonnet, and started walking.
Resolute, focused, determined, resigned,
Dolores with groceries on her mind.

'Twas a glorious morning—no morning so fair—
with larkspur and lilac perfuming the air.
"And how are you today, Mrs. Millicent Warner?"
She asked of the widow who lived on the corner.

"Quite well, indeed, tho' sad I am,
to have neither butter nor strawberry jam."
Dolores replied, "I happen to be taking
steps to the market. Come walking with me."

Thus, two elderly women continued their way
toward the neighborhood market that glorious day.
They met old Bridie Cullen on Cavendish Street.
She was going for crisps and a tin of meet.

With her cane tapping flagstone she joined the parade.
—a spinster—a widow—and lonely old maid.
"Sweet Jaysus and Mary," prayed pious Dolores,
"Bless and direct and defend and watch o'er us."


SWEET JAYSUS
SUGAR · TEA · MILK · COOKIES · BUTTER ···
JAM · CRISPIES · TIN OF MEAT · BOOZE
NOW!
PLEASE
JOE
DEFEND &
WATCH O'ER US

They arrived at the market. They burst through the door!
Millie Warner yelled, "All of you—*down on the floor!"*
Bridie flipped the sign over to the side with Closed on it,
while Dolores brandished a pin from her bonnet,

as if she was pointing a Colt 45, she cried,
"Nobody's leaving this market alive unless
all of the sugar and butter and tea
are forked over to Bridie and Millie and me!

Heads down! Don't move! Yes, you too dear . . .
or I'll jab every last bloomin' one of you here!
We'll be wanting your cookies and crispies as well,
or I'll send all you sweethearts to hell!"

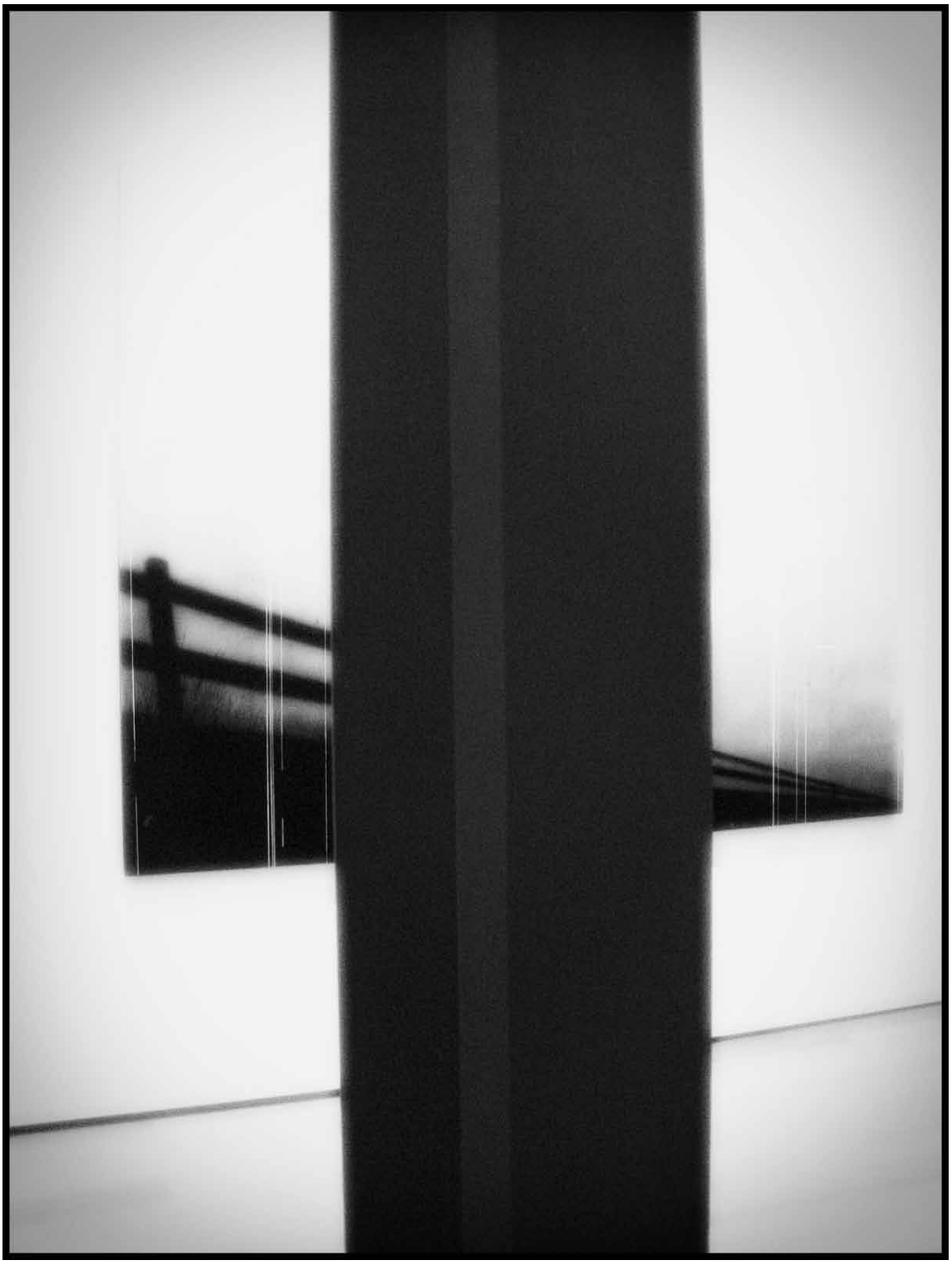
Bridie caned and disabled the security cam,
adding: "Don't forget milk and the strawberry jam!"
She poked at the stock boy: "Your ass is mine . . .
I'll ram this cane up where the sun don't shine
if you even so much as look up at my face—
so be a darlin' 'till we blow this place."

As Dolores and Bridie stuffed loot in their sack,
Millie went to get booze from the cooler out back.
Dolores demanded a carton of smokes,
a tin of meat, then she waved. "Toodle-oo, folks!"

They hotwired a Bentley, with pedal to metal,
and Dolores was soon boiling tea in her kettle,
back in her hide-out that night all alone,
Dolores Toodle was using her telephone,
to tell her two cronies, "We certainly must
take a walk one day soon to the Savings and Trust."

*As we age it may seem that we run out of time.*
*But you're never too old for a life of crime.*

* * * * * *



*Raymond Soulard, Jr.*

# Secret Joy Amongst These Times:
## The History of Scriptor Press, 1995 to the Present

*"Think for yourself*
*& question authority."*
—Dr. Timothy Leary

### Chapter Sixteen

continued from
*The Cenacle* | 75 | October 2010

For Scriptor Press, & for me personally, 2009 would be a year of lasts. It would be Kassi's & my last full year living in Portland; it would bear the last job I would work in Portland too; & it would be the last year we would go to the Burning Man Arts Festival in Black Rock City, Nevada. I knew none of this at year's commence, but by year's end I was close upon the decision to move back to Boston.

I'd first moved to the Pacific Northwest in 2002, in love with a girl I'd met in cyberspace, & with Burning Man. With the exception of about a year spent back in Connecticut, licking wounds from the girl's protracted rejection, I'd been living in either Seattle or Portland for the years since 2002. Attending Burning Man every year with my press's No Borders Free Bookstore project. Gotten married along the way, too, to another girl, Kassi, who I loved & love just as deeply, who'd stayed, & thus eventually even deeper. I'd visited back East a few times to see kin & sentimentalize, but little more. The Pacific Northwest was *home*; everywhere else was *not*.

What eventually led me to leave was at first a sense of disappointment, coupled with persistent economic troubles, & trumped finally by the same feeling I'd had years ago in coming out West: a desire to play out my struggles & victories on the playing field my heart & head wished. This was the last year it was the Pacific Northwest.

It's hard leaving a place. Even roots not deepest sunk cling to what stability they have. So this initially set out theme of the year will often seem barely there as it is detailed. But it's there. What were shadows little noticed during those days are, in retrospect, solid uncouplings, made of dissatisfactions, a few, then more as the months passed.

To begin this history's discussion of 2009 is to talk about the new American presidency of Barack Obama. Against much improbability, he took office on January 20. I wonder now, a couple of years later, if he was as convinced of his power to change things swiftly as the millions of us who voted for him were. He was elected with a seeming "mandate" not just to withdraw us from two disastrous wars, & recover the economy destroyed by George W. Bush, but to

restore the domestic safety net of law & justice.

If he had ascended to throne of King of America, maybe, just maybe, & I'm not sure even then. As it was, he did what he could as the solid ground below his feet disintegrated. He took steps to end the wars in Iraq & Afghanistan; he pushed a hurried, imperfect package of economic measures through Congress to avert a new Depression. He managed enactment of a healthcare reform law that cost him a lot of political capital. In short, he set about digging the country out of the miles-deep pile of shit Bush had left behind.

I can only think this additionally: if Obama had lost, if Arizona Senator John McCain had won this election, what then? Would he have expanded the two wars? Would he have done what was needed to restore the economy to at-least-feeble functionality? No way of knowing. McCain would have faced a Democrat-controlled Congress, no doubt quite arrayed against him. Maybe compromises would have been fought to, & worked out. I don't know. It's strange to wonder, & never to know.

One thing I recall Obama saying at the time was this: it was years creating the mess we found ourselves in—in the United States, around the world—, & it would not be quick getting out of it. And I would add: there will be new days, better days some of them, but no return. All that has happened, has happened. What comes will be a stewing mix of the familiar & the strange, & will not taste quite the same. Ever.

Getting Obama elected was a good thing, even if it didn't play out as he or anyone else supposed. There are too many special interests & corporate influence, entrenched corruption comfortably abed with the mainstream media, for any kind of coherent, intelligent government of generosity & good will to occur successfully. The years since 9/11 had decimated any widespread confidence in government, even in belief that things *could* get better as they had gotten worse. I still say: a good thing. It was a collective act of hope & faith. It mattered. It resonates.

The work I did in 2009 reflected the bad economy of the times. I did technical writer work on contract, since full-time work was little available. It was a long way from the security I'd had, or thought I had, with Symantec Corporation back in 2007-2008. My contract job through the spring was with Hewlett-Packard, a strange position, done remotely with a team of a dozen. The funny point worth mentioning is that hardly a week before the contract was set to end, everyone was laid off. Work unfinished, submitted in messy pieces. The checks cashed, when I finally received them in the mail.

My next job, at Standard Insurance in downtown Portland, a bike ride from home, lasted from May 2009 to May 2010. Though it was not a full-time job, it was the first good paid work I'd done since my Symantec job.

I was tasked with building the documentation program for the Disaster Recovery unit. I ranged in my work & dealings through both the business & information technology parts of this large, old company. It was steady work; I sat at my desk from 9 to 5. I bring it up here in this much detail because, my income assured for awhile, I was able to devote more of my time & energy to my pen & press. New ideas came, processes, strategies.

My struggle in recent years is not that I had to hold a job but that getting work became so fucking difficult. I think little of inheriting millions or winning a cash prize. Mostly I wish for work that is meaningful so that I can turn easily in my own hours from its concerns to those of my pen & press. I contend that when a society builds out its people's sense of identity largely from the paid tasks they perform, & then undoes millions of them by failing to provide

them with this work, something fundamental has gone wrong & must be fixed. Writing in late 2011 and into 2012, I observe that nothing has essentially improved from 2008 or 2009. I hold this problem to be the biggest one at stake right now—more than ideological squabbles or even environmental catastrophes. The foundation of society is a strong, pulsing population. If this does not exist, none of the other crises will be solved well or in good time. I was one of millions struggling in 2009 with no work, or temporary work at best, & this fact, I hold, weakened American society like a creeping sickness, taking over, changing things, undoing good accomplishments & meaningful connections in countless instances. Would you see the decline of a prosperous nation, you would look to the times like these when millions suffer & those in charge shrug helplessly & try to turn the debates in halls of power to blown-up trivia, or more likely bogie men chimeras, the threat of *someone somewhere*, riding closer or already arrived & hidden.

The litany of new press publications begins in April, when the release of *Scriptor Press Sampler* | 10 | *2008 Annual* coincided with the *ElectroLounge* website's 11th anniversary during which Kassi & I debuted the revamped site. It moved from a text link based design to a graphic link based design. I give Kassi most of the credit: she had the idea, learned the HTML code necessary to do the work in DreamWeaver, & produced the result.

*SPS* 10 features a really nice variety of work—fiction, poetry, essay, letter, artwork, photography—by artists living on both American coasts (as well as Judih Haggai in Israel). The fifteen contributors will likely never all share the same physical space, but they do share these pages. There's something that feels magical to me in making this singular connection among these good & gifted people. It's not enough for me to know & support each person's efforts; I want to widen a little each person's map of knowings, indicate the presence of previously unmet peers, brothers & sisters out there.

As mentioned above, *The ElectroLounge* got its revamp in April. Its *Dance at Bougival* image is now a doorway in of sorts, to a main page laid out somewhat like a table of contents. The various projects—*Cenacle, Sampler, RaiBooks,* Jellicle Guild meetings, Burning Man Books, & "Within's Within"—list pictorially down the center, each with its own linked archives, while my poetry, fixtion, & online notebooks are on the left side bar, & the various pages of recommended links are on the right side bar. Tis meant to be luring, to encourage one to try this & that, but I think a bit old-fashioned too in a way. The projects are publications & audio, not multimedia, not content that exists online only. Every bit can be

downloaded (or at least printed).

I've wondered toward multimedia for *ElectroLounge*, or video at least. Not yet done aught with it. I'm a words & pictures & sounds person but not yet one who has developed ideas on assembling these. Perhaps not ready. Maybe time is a factor too, as one can only do so much work. I don't know. I suppose I don't yet jive with pure cyberspace art. One day that door may open.

One of my many intermittent back projects over the years has been to create a complete archives for my "Within's Within" radio show. I started recording its episodes on cassette back in 1999-2002 during its Radio Free Cambridge / Allston-Brighton Free Radio days, & digitally when it moved online to SpiritPlants Radio in 2003. By the start of 2009, there'd been approximately 300 episodes of the show, & I doubt half of those had been cleaned up & posted at the *ElectroLounge* site.

So in 2009, in addition to doing approximately three new episodes a month, I decided I had to push the archive goal further. Rather than continuing to add older shows 6 or 8 at a time every so often, I decided in July to commit foremost to adding the most recent show a couple of days after its broadcast. And still add more of the older shows too, but this shift in priority. I think this idea ties into the expansion of SpiritPlants Radio as a whole. I wanted visitors from there to the *ElectroLounge*'s "Within's Within" radio page to find new episodes, to get the impression of continual new episodes to hear. Eventually the making of the show became: research new materials, assemble play list, broadcast & record for three hours on Saturdays, create an unedited version for re-broadcast on Sunday, & edit the recording & upload to the archives by Tuesday morning.

This process was cobbled together & refined over a number of years of trial & error. I remember back in the early days preparation was bringing some albums, notebooks, & reading material, along with a few blank cassettes, doing the show, & listening to the show after while on the transit in Boston. As I became more ambitious, the show & its preparations developed. Though it changes here & there still, the changes are more creative, less about mechanical efficiency. That's so much more preferable of course. The part of the show's week that matters most is those three live hours on Saturday morning into the afternoon.

*Cenacle* | 68 | April 2009 made it delayed debut in early June (I have a working theory to share regarding this tardiness & process later in this chapter). For most of its production time I was jobless & looking for work. This state of things, & its resolution in early May, is a minor undercurrent of the issue. A far more important one is the fact of eleven contributors, three of them new. Start with these new ones first.

I've known the artist AbandonView as an online friend for quite a few years. I've always admired his artwork, & so invited him to create the color cover for the 14th anniversary issue. I like very much his collage-style result as well as Kassi's elegantly simple layout of the page. While this was the third issue with a color cover (the second for an anniversary issue), it was the first anniversary issue with color on the front & back covers both. Kassi's fascination with taking close-up photographs of flowers adorns the back.

Also new to the *Cenacle*, & also an old friend from online, is Christopher Patrick Gose. This issue inaugurates the four-issue serialization of his Peru journal titled "World's Window: Ruminations Entheonautic & Otherwise." He recounts the journey he & his partner took down to the jungles of Peru in 2010 to find & work with ayahuasca shamans. Ayahuasca is a psychedelic healing medicine not well known in the Western industrialized world. These early pages of the journal recount his chewing coca leaves for stimulation, & his work on his longstanding emotional struggles. The editing I did with his original text was extensive. It was the task of converting a series of well-recorded events to a narrative, gaining coherence without losing the excitement of fresh remembrances. Kassi laid out the piece with Chris's photos & it looks very nice indeed.

Susan Jones is a writer Kassi & I met locally when we moved to Portland. She attended several of the revived Jellicle Guild meetings. At one of these, she read to the group a short fiction called "The Suitcase," culled from a longer group of writings she'd done during & after a time spent living in Russia. It's the story of the trouble an old woman takes to try & bury her friend's dead dog, & it is very funny indeed.

After an issue's absence, Ric Amante's poetry returns to *The Cenacle*'s pages. Of note here, upon reviewing these poems now, is the opening & the closing to his poem "Citizen X." It begins:

> *Citizen X decides to grant himself a news-freeze,*
> *to tap into his inner globalism*
> *and listen and watch*
> *the booms in his mind,*
> *the busts in his heart,*
> *warfare among viscera,*
> *peace treaties between the senses.*

It concludes:

> *The civic lessons of Citizen X*
> *are the unmediated gifts*
> *of white clouds above,*
> *the full awareness of strange forces without,*
> *the real news of starlight*
> *streaming steadily in.*

I think this poem catches finely the struggle people have in reconciling the swallowing reality of the human drama with the just-as-potent fact of a larger world that notices, in greater & lesser ways, & is sometimes virtually indifferent save for the damage men do—& a universe more likely as not that *does not give a damn*. It seems almost impossible to shut down completely a human mind, but turning its attention elsewhere from human matters for a while is a marvelous blessing.

Judih Haggai's contribution consists of four poems & three pictures. Her poem "Is Winning What It's All About?" ends strikingly:

> *how serious the moment*
> *the win, the prize*
> *how serious?*
> *who's serious?*
> *it's an elusive illusion*
> *can't fool me*

I notice a theme running through the work of both these poets. Awareness as an activity not an assumed state. The danger of any one kind of mind-set, any single group of priorities. The shifting balance, its unstaying composition.

G.C. Dillon's short fiction "One Bullet" is the taut story of a Navy pilot who seems to have crashed on an island somewhere in the Bermuda Triangle. He is hunted by some kind of mythical beast. Told in second person, its climax comes in the form of a choice: hope or despair. Again I see the thread running from this story to other pieces in the issue, especially in the pilot's cry: "*I'll not die today! you say, you swear, you make a new vow.*"

Ralph Emerson's language essay "C & G Again: Gleaming Skin" sums beautifully in its closing lines:

> *It's entirely appropriate the 'eye' and 'surface' words should converge here, for what can eyes see of the world except its surfaces? Skin, clothes, sky, complexions, the ground beneath our feet, lakes frozen under winter sun—all those gleaming skins, all those zillion-bubbled sheets of electron candy-shells that make up the visible faces of everything we see: clouds, grass, man, woman, tree, snake, apple.*

This an argument that what is *seen* is what *is*. And what is controls even how one thinks to speak of it. A different angle on awareness.

A fourth new contributor of sorts to the issue is Fyodor Dostoevsky's short fiction "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man," which had also been re-printed in the Burning Man Books series in 2008. It is the story of a man's redemptive vision, of him thinking he had gained & then lost everything, only to gain something new in the end:

> *The chief thing is to love others like yourself, that's the chief thing, and that's everything; nothing else is wanted—you will find out at once how to arrange it all. And yet it's an old truth which has been told and retold a billion times—but it has not formed part of our lives! The consciousness of life is higher than life, the knowledge of the laws of happiness is higher than happiness—that is what one must contend against.*

Again, the theme, the struggle, to apprehend what's real, what's good, what to do, & how, in a shifting world, in one's own shifting mind & heart: *how to live, how to live, how to live & why?*

What's funny about these disparate pieces is the common feel of questions & gropings that run through them &, even further, how much they share with the epigraph from Heraclitus in my "From Soulard's Notebooks" essay:

> *The nature of things*
> *is in the habit*
> *of concealing itself.*

Heraclitus was a pre-Socratic philosopher who lived about 2500 years ago. Yet his comment still sounds fresh, still applies to the struggles countless numbers of people have faced since then, not just writers. What writers face singularly, however, is the challenge of *interpretation* & *explanation*. We still don't know for certain how to live & why, & our conflicts most often root in this uncertainty, & in the very real clash of the various answers our political, religious, & social leaders align with. Moreover, many of these leaders will assume that bearing the power to impose a set of living imperatives over a population somehow equates to knowing & possessing the *truth*, to knowing the *right* way over other wrong ways. Such sums the simple, the complex, & the incomprehensible history of humanity. Regarding the combative nature of human societies, & their struggles to account for resolving their conflicts enough to do right by their populations, I write in this essay:

> *If it isn't Christ or 2012, or a monster asteroid, or some such, then what will break the feast & famine cycle will be us, all of us, going further than we have before dared, pushing through what restrains us, past fear, maybe past mortality itself.*

The possibilities for great or small creation or destruction exist innumerably now as ever. The same racial mind that launched men into the sky & landed them on the moon also built the ovens to burn humans alive. We stand as the Great Maybe, the Great Potential, the What-if. We have changed the planet itself not merely by our presence but *by our will*.

Those who decry the dangers of too-rapid technological advances are no more fully right than those who feel we are not advancing rapidly enough. Over the centuries we have studied the world & our own race, & the stars above, closer & closer, asking better questions, finding subtler ideas toward answering them *yet still millions starve, suffer, die lonely & unhappy & ignorant of why.* In all cultures, at ages, all levels of economic prosperity. And still countless others find bliss, ecstasy, even reasons why to explain it all. Look around you in any crowded place. Every stratum of the possibilities of the human condition is likely to be represented around you.

In *Many Musics*, *Fourth Series*, I put forth one of my own ongoing ideas about these matters:

> *Little answer to this world but*
> *each touches each*
> *& a mystery runs through all.*

One can use the arguments of mysticism or modern physics to say about the same thing, & I believe that's because the playing field is wide & deep & multi-dimensional. When I write "*each touches each*," I don't just mean living men & women, nor even the human race as a whole. I mean the entirety of the world, breaching artificial boundaries of living & dead, organic & inorganic, now & then & hence, & I would expand the playing field to include all of creation, everywhere & always. This same thinking permeates my *Why?* fixtion:

> *Slave to everything. Slave to nothing. Slave to what? I ask again & again . . . .*
> *Yes, be kind. Yes, life is mysterious.*
> *Yes, all is connected. Yes, many*
> *is one is all. Yes & yes.*

Essentially working with the same ideas, trying to parse out at least the "*how to live*" portion of my constant question about "*how to live, how to live, how to live & why?"* But, in sum, I think of my various kinds of writing as of a piece, all coming from my mind directing my eye & hand to move my black pen. As Neil Young once said to a critic of his music, "It's all one song." In "Notes from the Northwest" I write:

> *The world blares through us unceasing & yet we do not know. Can we know, all or any of us? Maybe. And yes. Or no. No wonder some end up in institutions, others on the street, others with crowns on their heads, others feeding, breeding, shitting, & dying. The world seems to be both its own problem & its own solution. A = A.*

"*A = A*" as an explanation for the world that has become another of my main working ideas. It excludes nothing, which is the good news, though its application is tricky. Elaborated upon, the idea is that the world is not prelude or punishment or test, but instead all that is needed, complete, a full creation, a piece only in the sense that there are other worlds & different kinds of phenomena that exist in the universe. If there is any kind of God, in the traditional sense of a cosmic creator-being, that God is here, all around, in every eye & leaf & bit of detritus. Not distant in a Heaven gated against the non-human as well as against those humans deemed not worthy. If we come from distant stars, the evidence of that is here, in some way. Likewise, if our consciousness derives from early contact with tryptamine spores or the like, the evidence of that is here too.

In short, the universe is *home*, & this planet is our local address. We will survive & perpetuate as a race, as well our planet as a whole, by what each of us does. We each play a valid part. Will explanations come upon death? I don't know. If so, they are, it seems at least, not communicable back to the living.

So perhaps the answer to my "*how to live & why*?" question is to try to act as though even the inconsequential matters, & that the more cosmic answers exist even if I don't know them nor believe the claims of any others. I believe life is a strange gift but a gift nonetheless, like a shifting series of open doors, more & less obvious—& this too is just another idea among countless, but it cheers me, is encouraging mind food for me to reach for, especially when I need some help back up from times when I've been knocked down by others, or by my own doing.

The cover of *Cenacle* | 69 | June 2009 is of an abandoned building's roughly painted-

over windows; Kassi's design gives the whole image a cracked & decayed look. The epigraph page, of a similar design, quotes from the Shins' song "Young Pilgrims": *"Fate isn't what we're up against / there's no design, no flaws to find."* My "From Soulard's Notebooks" opening essay, written to the reader-at-large, contends that:

> *things change but not, it seems, by formula, not predictably, not hung upon any pattern, though men will seek a pattern, & sometimes write wildly of what they find.*

What then follows could be interpreted as yet another wild writing, maybe. I argue there is *"a wild card in things, in nature, in the human heart, in the cosmos itself,"* & that it is a presence not just in men & women but in *"each & all that exists."* These themes & ideas run through much of the issue, in the form of arguments, assertions, & questions grappled over. The pattern is simply present as much as it emerges through analysis.

Fate. Pattern. Wild card in things. I refer back to the cover here because one could come at it looking for a pattern, a how in the manner by which each windowpane's paint-over has come to look it way it does. Or look at the early lines of Jim Burke III's letter in which he argues that:

> *there are different levels of truth perceived by different people, depending on each individual's relative view of our cultural transparency. This view, or subjective opinion, related directly to individual intellect, can range from very narrow—almost down to the non-existent—to a wide spectrum of analytical and philosophical thought. The truth, ultimately, is a venue to realize self-actualization, whether it be by the pursuit of art, love, peace, or a number of absolutes in their highest form.*

Does individual perception drive fate? Forge the patterns of one's choices, & thus one's mortal days? Does it comprise the "*wild card in things*"? And what of these questions themselves? Where lies the power: in their being asked or which answers?

Further along, deeper in, collecting glints, & come to Chris Gose's assertion in "World's Window" that:

> *the often irrational and confounding vicissitudes of the heart, soul and psyche, have a truth and reality as compelling as anything understood according to the current state of our comprehension of the material universe.*

So it is that the mysteries of feeling that must be accounted for in grappling more fully for the truth. He continues:

> *Gnosis/knowledge, then, truly becomes a function of revealing that which was hidden and unknown, a sort of light in infinite regress, with each revelation containing within it the*

> *seed of some future enlightenment—albeit in a veiled and phosphorescent form—and each successive seed then dissolving the fruition of the previous seeding and awakening.*

Does truth reveal in facets depending on whoever is looking at it, & how—as a child, an old man, in this country or that one, during this century or many ago? To paraphrase Yeats, how to tell the truth seeker from truth sought?

How to tell indeed. In his language essay "F is for Flutter," Ralph Emerson observes that the lingual "*webs made by . . . associations stretch out very similarly inside each of our heads. These webs lie just below conscious awareness, in a twilight [of] hidden chatter."* So something is common among us, not just our bodies, our DNA, our shared planet home. In the murk of each human mind, there are to be found some profound samenesses, common lingual tangles, belying the rest. It is reassuring, perhaps because it can be shown thus by a persuasive thinker such as Emerson.

And yet. And yet. We each wake & walk & sleep in a distinct body & skull. We bond, we *bind* in countless ways but not in total perpetually. In his sci-fi/fantasy short fiction "Come Away O Human Child," G.C. Dillon's narrator faces his past in the form of re-encountering a woman he abandoned, & a child, not his, whose very presence undoes him:

> *I've seen things, experienced wild things: The cold rings of Saturn, floating above the red spot. An orange sky with two daytime moons, a rocky, dwarf silver mine. But all these failed behind the sight before me.*

The tightest embrace, the profoundest issue from it, stands a speck against the confounding singularity of mortal human life, its bright noisy pollution of half-answers, each presented as whole & complete.

Judih Haggai in her poem "Waking in the Morning" confronts this head on:

> *Waking in the morning,*
> *how old am I,*
> *am I still here?*
> *Who dwells inside,*
> *is she still there,*
> *horrific but fabulous—*
> *life goes on—*

Confronts, grapples, then life muscles her along. There is no choice, save the time spent on the poem, reporting what all feel, some kind, some broken piece, of the truth. Or, perhaps better, something true whether or not it is *truth*.

In the issue's reprinted poems of Galway Kinnell, among these the marvelous "Saint Francis and the Sow," another angle is proposed on the same dilemma:

> *The bud*
> *stands for all things,*
> *even for those things that don't flower,*
> *for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;*

*though sometimes it is necessary*
*to reteach a thing its loveliness,*
*to put a hand on its brow*
*of the flower*
*and retell it in words and in touch*
*it is lovely*
*until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing;*
*as Saint Francis*
*put his hand on the creased forehead*
*of the sow, and told her in words and in touch*
*blessings of earth on the sow, and the sow*
*began remembering all down her thick length,*
*from the earthen snout all the way*
*through the fodder and slops to the spiritual curl of the tail,*
*from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine*
*down the great broken heart*
*to the sheer blue milken dreaminess spurting and shuddering*
*from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking and blowing beneath them:*
*the long, perfect loveliness of sow.*

The hope in things lies in the perspective Burke has written of: pursuing truth in its highest form: in Kinnell's words, re-teaching a thing its loveliness. Crossing borders—even before this, *opening* borders—rather than attempting to eradicate them by assertion or denial. "*[R]eteach a thing its loveliness"* grants each of us a power in our mortal beings: to give, to receive, to teach, to learn. Alone, but perhaps not lonely. Touch, & its memory, to comfort, to urge. Has come, will come again, accumulates.

My other pieces in the issue sit square among these concerns & themes. Of note in my *Many Musics, Fourth Series* is the sixtieth & final poem of the sequence, "Hunger: A Song." This poem was one of my longest & most ambitious in awhile, ranging between narrative & poetical passages, telling the story of a preacher, holed up in a motel room with a gun & a girl, against the backdrop of a group watching the preacher's stand-off with the police, covered by the media, on a local bar's TV. There's a lot going on, but I think it's in the preacher's following lines that this poem crosses with the issue's other pieces:

> *Violence & tenderness. God wants us to crush both of these for him, wants us to relinquish ourselves, our wills, whatever defiant hangs by our bones.*

The struggle in heeding man-wrought gods is that they tend to resemble their human leaders: demanding obedience, deferring answers, pressing forth suffering & supplication as valid forms of truth-seeking, as somehow bearing truth in themselves. Assertions whored up as answers. Toward its ambiguous ending, the preacher says, "*Myths breathe by the men who believe, & expire when the last one has fallen.*" I could add that always will new men rise & with them a new set of myths.

And the dangers of these myth-bearers: This is what my "Notes from the Northwest"

dwells upon:

> *There is in this nation a thick, ugly strata of thinking, a self-righteousness, driven unto fury to purify the population & drive out or destroy those who would not take their assigned part. It is only a part of the population, but it is the most dangerous, the most unwilling to reason, the most likely to burn, to pillage, to murder, & then kneel afterwards with shining eyes raised to the skies, convinced that the destruction & spilled blood is a necessary part of doing God's will & work.*

Founded by zealots, geniuses, & misfits, this country shamblingly swings in various directions, a powerful half-mad talking beast, uncertain of its path, only part-heeding what damage it causes itself & others, convinced a clean, *simple* day is coming because it must be. *Must*. And yet:

> *What yearns in each human heart toward truth, a clear answer regarding how to live & why, can as easily raise a fist toward another as hold out a hand. No legislation can snuff out such a yearning, no education can with certainty lessen its power, or its vulnerability to smiling lunatics in handsome suits, bearing books of pretty words about cleansing annihilations.*

So I warn, full knowing lunatics can take countless forms & grapple to power in countless ways. I can only, in the end, point one way, another, warn, urge *beware & be aware*.

And, finally, to my fixtion *Why?*, its conclusion after serializing for six issues going back to 64 | April 2008. I call it a "*psychotropic fairy tale, metaphysical travelogue*" &, relevant to this discussion, write in its pages that "*every answer roots in quicksand.*" None of its narrative strands conclude, as I was already working on a sequel story; what makes me glad about *Why?* is that I was writing my kind of fixtion again in it. Its predecessor, *Things Change? [Six Levels]*, had become one long bloody cry, an ugly thing of beauty. I wanted new characters to mixture with old, new narratives to carry along, *fresh troubles.*

What makes *The Cenacle* interesting to me over the years is that it is as much built from my endless written grapplings with the Universe as it is from those of others I know, like, & admire. These variously constructed reports are different enough to remain persistently engaging, & similar enough to be medicinally reassuring. All accumulates.

Maybe it's fitting that the last year we travelled to the Burning Man Arts Festival was from Portland. Because of my fascination with the West, I'd discovered Burning Man in '98, & had travelled there from Boston in '99. And because of the Portland girl I'd met in 2001, I'd aimed my sights to live there—even when the girl & I were no longer in each other's pictures. And so it was in 2009, not knowing this in advance, that we prepared for our last Burning Man, while living in Portland for one last complete year. And we lived in the northeast area of Portland, walking distance from the places I'd frequented during my months-long vigil for the girl back in 2002-2003. A Taco Bell, a cool joint called Coffee Time, some funky restaurants. It's funny how sometimes when one is most familiarly & long time surrounded by the known does a door to elsewhere appear, & one considers, & sometimes nods, & sometimes goes.

I think I let go a little more of Burning Man in my later years attending in that I did not so much chase its mysteries as keep what I had of it in my heart. I carried it along with me. There was a gradual diminishment of my expectation that it would shockingly delight me as

it once had. I held onto it, as one holds onto a faith, in anything or anyone, when there is no clear place or person to move this faith along to. As long as enough fire remains, to remind & to illuminate these memories, one does not move along.

And I asked myself once again the question someone had asked me there years before: "Is there anywhere else you'd rather be the week leading up to Labor Day than Black Rock City?" For my eleventh & last year, I said no, there wasn't.

So once more I began my preparations for us to bring No Borders Free Bookstore to the desert fest. Back in 1999 the process had been so much simpler. For one thing, picking the titles meant choosing among the many, many writers I admired. By 2009, I'd gone through 50 of my favorites. How many does any one person have? As the years had gone on, I more & more had to seek out new writers, experiment, test, or dredge up writers I recalled reading years ago & see what I thought of them now. It was a subtle process in that I had to police myself with the following test: can I talk up this writer's work with my greatest, most unalloyed enthusiasm? If I didn't believe totally in the little books we sat in the desert under a big tent handing out to hundreds of strangers, what was I doing then?

This exploration, I can see more clearly now, took its toll. My reading habits began to revolve more & more around which writers might provide good material for chapbooks. This bothered me some even as it was a challenge I rose to for a number of years running. I determined to make each year's half-dozen new books as fine a crop as those of the previous years. It mattered as much in 2009 as it had every year running back to '99. As I contemplate now a new book series in the Burning Man Books mode, my thoughts remain the same: do it fucking right, *no question.*

There was a shifting context to the preparation of those last half-dozen books, & the printing of the whole series, plus the *RaiBook*s, the *Sampler*s, & the recent *Cenacle*s. My new job was by no means a sure & long-term situation. It hardly seemed it would last the six months offered in the contract. We thought of Burning Man 2009 in part as a chance to talk to a lot of San Francisco-area residents about life further down the coast, what we might find there.

Too, the work on the *Cenacle* drifted into July. I think this was in part (this being the theory promised earlier) because there was no Jellicle Guild date to work with as a hard deadline. Plus I was producing my radio show every weekend as well as helping get about a dozen others broadcast on SpiritPlants Radio. And I was writing my various projects as often as possible. In sum, it was *a lot* to be doing. The new Burning Man Books produced, I'm proud to say, were worth the efforts of many nights' work.

The titles are: *Slouching Toward Bethlehem* by Joan Didion; *The Secret Sharer* by Joseph Conrad; *Silent Snow, Secret Snow* by Conrad Aiken; *The Story of Sinbad the Sailor from the Arabian Nights*; *Fate Isn't What We're Up Against: An Eleventh Anthology of Writings About Psychedelics*; & *The Long, Perfect Loveliness of Sow: Selected Poetry of Galway Kinnell*. There are some strange crossovers in themes among these titles. *Sinbad* & *Secret Sharer* are both about ocean voyages & bear mysterious atmospheres; *Silent Snow* is all mysterious atmosphere & ends so terrifyingly that it stayed solid in my memory since I read it a quarter-century before. Didion's essay was Kassi's pick & I can't help but think that its portrait of Haight-Ashbury San Francisco fit well with the San Francisco-created Burning Man Festival of four decades later. I was led to Galway Kinnell's poetry in part by studying & publishing the work of his friend W.S. Merwin in 2008. Finally, the eleventh psychedelics sampler pleases me in several ways,

from its cover portrait of a broken steps leading to a tree, to be found in a park in Portland not far from where we lived, to its continuing our mission to educate people about the promise, possibilities, & *seriousness* of these materials.

So we drove our days & miles from Portland to Black Rock City, Nevada, put up our tent, set up No Borders Free Bookstore for four long hot worthwhile days, wandered the strange city at night, made many friends for a moment, an hour, a few days, sent me out a couple of long solo bike rides into the night while Kassi rested from the day's heat, enjoyed one more time the spectacular burning of the Man come Saturday, packed up on Sunday, & returned with a bit of a meander through Bend, to Portland.

I dream of Black Rock City still, from time to time. I miss it sentimentally, am profoundly glad I discovered it, contributed to it, & moved on while it still could matter to me in memory. But I also carry it with me, still, it changed me. I don't think I'll return but a big part of me has never left.

As part of my commitment to make *The ElectroLounge* an up-to-date & ever-more-complete online archives of Scriptor Press projects, I added my fixtion *Why? [a new fixtion]* to the site, & also updated ongoing parts of my current works, *Many Musics* & *Labyrinthine*. These last two are being serialized ongoing in *The Cenacle*, & so are updated on *ElectroLounge* on a quarterly basis (this *History* is also updated on *ElectroLounge* as its chapters appear in *The Cenacle*'s pages).

I also read *Many Musics*' new poems & *Labyrinthine*'s new pages on the thrice-monthly "Within's Within" radio program. Also synched here are the quarterly Jellicle Guild meetings where I read these writings as well. And they are among the recorded highlights that appear in *The Cenacle*'s supplementary disk.

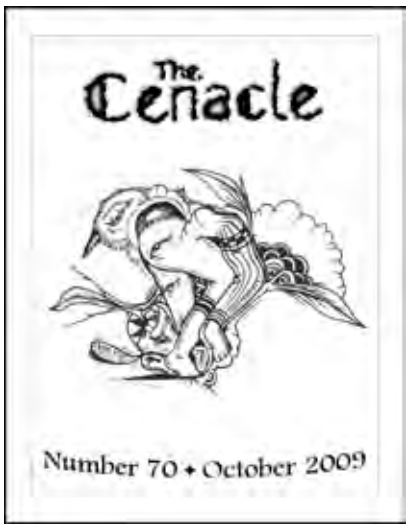
Essentially I seek synchrony among projects, a criss-crossing between & among them so that they are more connected & thus each strengthened. What's being described here wasn't possible in Scriptor Press's early days & so now that it is, it is vitally important that better & better ideas be conceived & *enacted*.

My eventual goal is to digitize all of *The Cenacle*s (#1-46 await), all of my radio show archives ('99-2002 are still only on cassette tape), & all of the Jellicle Guild meetings whose highlights appeared in *The Cenacle* going back to the 4/1/95 meeting in issue 1 in 1995. There are more ideas forthcoming & the trick is to integrate these with the ongoing. The goal always is *synchrony*.

I came back from Burning Man 2009 with a charge of new energy, & also with a question of where to next. Portland's Bush-wrecked economy wasn't getting better, & while our affections for the city were still strong, our abiding need to stay had diminished over time. Like Seattle after several years, we felt a wish to move on. The choice came down to San Francisco or Boston. Move into the source of Burning Man or . . . the source of me.

I really didn't know. I'd thought I'd left Boston for good in May 2002, had, in fact only returned for a couple of visits. I thought I'd run my course there, having visited for a decade & then lived there for another decade.

And yet, San Francisco? An expensive new place, & me with no job in hand, nor any real connections. I allowed it to be a possibility, a strong one but, notably, didn't even make a visit there (my first had been in '95; Kassi's never been). These were among my thoughts, living solidly in one place, but looking around, as the work for *Cenacle* | 70 | October 2009 commenced.




A travel through *Cenacle* | 70 | October 2009 must certainly begin with its beguiling cover by AbandonView, who had of course contributed *Cenacle* 68's color cover. His work is both highly surreal & quite precise, as though his images do exist, solid as an exquisitely-rendered thought. His art also appears among the pages of my fixtion *Labyrinthine*.

I'd been writing *Labyrinthine* for three years when it began serializing in *The Cenacle*. (as of this writing in June 2012, I'm still writing it & it is still being serialized).

I've mentioned in earlier chapters that *Labyrinthine* & my current poetry sequence *Many Musics* comprise portions of my *Double Triptych* project (along with the previous poetry sequences *6 x 36 Nocturnes* & *New Songs [for Kassandra]* & the earlier fixtions *Things Change? [Six Thresholds]* and *Why?*). My intent is toward perpetual culmination, a sort of continuous building-up from what was previously written. *It's all one song*.

*Labyrinthine* starts with six characters, each of them waking up somewhere recognizable from sometime in each's past, remembering the sound of a maybe-gunshot. Are they dead? In coma? Dreaming? Some, none, or all of these, yes & no & otherwise.

There is no easy way to explain this book, since it is a culmination of my years & writing so far. It is about Art, sex, want, music, nature, dreams, death; it is an elaborate game in many ways. Multiple realities, singular realities, broken realities all play in. The following offers a funny hint:

> *One night I danced in an electric labyrinth & told a stranger the story of the Minotaur, Ariadne's thread, & so on, I was luscious with the moony desert night & long sips of haha juice I walked the electric labyrinth, swinging with it back & forth til arriving in its center, the stranger asked if I was the Minotaur what a strange question—*
>
> *I stayed days away from these pages, scribbled tittering little notes but not approach otherwise—*
>
> *I wanted to find the book here I could write smoothly, thought I did, the book not made of rags & rages, the one I could hand around to anyone easily—*
>
> *No. This book is like war, it never leaves & never refines, little explain yet so much bears—this book is like want, like the pull toward fecund flesh, toward bright fruit, toward the melody-wrapped beat going on tonight & every night—*

Funny I say because of how here & elsewhere Burning Man riffs & riffs through this issue. This issue features the first part of *Labyrinthine* that introduces a number of its major characters as aforementioned. What I enjoyed about writing this fixtion from the get-go was that I was again writing a story of conjured characters—as I had resumed doing in *Why?*—yet still I mixed in my life & world, as I had for much of *Things Change?*—but it was all deeper this time, vaster, weirder, funnier. I was determined to write a work from every direction as ambitious as I'd ever tried, far more. Because, as I've noted, this first part had been written in 2006, I knew in October 2009 how much further it had gone. My wish, more gained in very recent times, is to close the writing/publishing gap. I think of Charles Dickens & the novels of his that he serialized in his journals *Household Words* and *All Year Round*. Essentially, *The Cenacle* as a kind of elaborate, quarterly, freaky-deaky newspaper. Linking up with my radio show & the Jellicle Guild as different mediums of the same reportage.

What I grapple with in *Labyrinthine* is what Richard Brautigan writes about in his last novel, *An Unfortunate Woman: A Journey*, published posthumously in 1994, & quoted in this issue's epigraph:

> *It becomes more and more apparent, as I proceed with this journey, that life cannot be controlled and perhaps not even envisioned, and that certainly design and portent are out of the question.*

This conclusion, at least in part, led to his suicide. I'd like to think there are other valid options. And I can't say I full agree with his sentiments, or at least always. Cannot be *completely* controlled, or envisioned, & if there be design, it is either hid, as Heraclitus argued, or so obvious that it is everywhere one looks, in everything one thinks or feels, even if one is not human nor even necessarily animate. *A = A*. Still, the struggle in his words is a common one, & stands perhaps as much a warning against despair as an expression of it.

But one has to move, to decide, to act. The human world is frenetic, both fast & slow. One can become less imperfect over time at learning what moves are possible, which in combination, develop not a formula but an intelligent intuition toward things. This is, in essence, what I urged upon President Obama in my annual letter to him:

> *For awhile you will have to play with practically breathless perfection, & hope or pray the Universe or some equal potency is mostly on your side. So I say this: play it through. Hesitate*

> *less often until not at all. There's a moment in playing the great games—in making the great works of Art—in conceiving the greatest thoughts of science & philosophy & learning—a moment when impediments fall aside & the way opens clear. You are nearing that point, Mister President, Barack, where trust is all, action is all, you will no longer make the moves,* the moves will make you.

I'd call my advice as valid as any & yet do not disengage from Brautigan's ideas, for no matter what one does, one dies a physical death after a few, many, or many many years. It comes. Was Brautigan wrong to take his end into his own hands? I can't say, save that one's death leaves others grieving in a world long familiar with grief. The world no more plainly explains itself to me or you or Obama or to Brautigan, yet all but the last of these remain here, & here remains in many instances & places an utterly beautiful place. I would prefer to keep learning the moves of life, urging Obama & everyone else to do so too, than leave it. I hope I always think this.

But what then, when death comes? In Jim Burke III's letter, he writes, as he had previously, that when we die, we become stars. Literally, figuratively, he doesn't settle between these for sure. But he does observe the following:

> *The Eastern philosophies . . . continually point out that it is not only possible, but that the actual purpose of physical life is to achieve a mind-body connection by discovering absolute truth, then dissolving it. The absolute truth resides within the physical body. When we die, the absolute truth—pure love, unconditional, non-abstract—is released into the cosmos. What actually happens during this process is unknown, and many doubters will rush to point out that this is only conjecture. But I would respond that existence has always been, and we only measure it in the physical plane. Such devices would not exist on the metaphysical plane, because they would not be needed. Time would not exist, at least with respect to relativity, because there would be no need to measure it, to use it, no need to breathe and, finally, there would be no need to love. The cycle of duality would be broken, and that is all that would exist: peace and love. Hate and violence would not and could not exist.*

I would remark that the picture he sketches is one I find more appealing than traditional portraits of bearded god-men, judgment books, torment, for the so-called "damned." I say distrust anyone who speaks not of *faith* or *belief* but of *truth*. Unyielding branches in the wind *certainly break*.

Then there is the way small things, private memories, can contrive a universe in one's mind too. Reck Judih Haggai's poem "One September":

> *in rush, a sweeping watermark*
> *one lone shard, one lone remnant*
> *we lived here long ago*
> *we barefoot, silly artists*
> *creating heavenly earthenware*
> *all for one*
> *till we all fell down*
> *one large rush*

*swept away one september*
*while water weeps*
*tears become tides*
*and the cycle goes on*

In the music of her words, she re-creates a gone place, time, group of artists, & then recounts them in a tide of tears, an aching memory as big as mind, mind as large as the world, & the cycle of union & dissolution that many artists feel & broach, & create from, on behalf of all—& whether one believes suicide, or legislation or metaphysical perspective can hold against this cycle of coming & going, none can. Yet on each of us continues in the meantime. On the world continues in the meantime. On the world continues, even as each of us eventually falls.

But, said opposite, each one of us does continue before that fall. Each of us aware of death a little differently, & a change in that individual awareness over a lifetime, as we each witness death's real hand taking those we know & love, or admire afar, & feel each his or her own body grow, bloom, mature, & begin to weaken slowly, or suddenly. Yet each of us continues in the meantime.

I was asking myself where Kassi & I would live next, & what I would do. I devote all of "Notes from the Northwest" to this matter:

> *For I recognize it's been my restlessness that has moved me from Hartford to Boston to Seattle to Portland to . . . ? Millions live in each place & stay . . . . I have not. I land, rest, work, & eventually move along.*

On to San Francisco, or return to Boston? Finally a full-time job after contracting for over a year? A two-way commitment with an employer? An answer, oh again & ever sought, to "*How to live & why*"? I conclude conclusion-less-ly:

> *So I look for work, another scrabbling man for his lucky chance, & a home that feels like home in hours high, sad, & common. But more really, a sense of fullness which nears & eludes most, if not all, of us all our lives. A sense that "Why?" is answered, if not in sentences, then by our actions, way of life, that what we do embodies what we believe rather than vice-versa.*

It is both curious & delightful that another common thread among contributions is discovered in Ralph H. Emerson's language essay "D is for Down." Describing this watery letter of darkness, he observes that humans, who cannot see in the dark, confer upon things of light a wisdom, a safety, a goodness. Darkness is full of danger, *"is evil,"* & "*means ignorance*." He says: "*Until we can see in the dark like cats, human thinking will always favor light.*"

Now writers are tricky creatures & while some will indeed reveal the usual human preference for the light, not all will, or easily so anyway. On the one hand there is Ric Amante's tale in the poem "Thoughts Upon Encountering a Fire-pit in the Woods," in which he speculates on what the remains of a campfire, some beer cans, a tarp, & a sweat shirt might signify:

*The hope and power of flames in the night*
*kept him safe, enthralled;*
*the alcohol kept him dancing.*

Yet, Amante says, "*once the fire stopped speaking, / his legs became paste, his mind oozed*"—& Amante hopes that the dancer/drinker found his comfort in the "quiet study" of time. Darkness itself offered no comforts of its own; quite the opposite, it is implied.

On the other hand, in the issue's installment of Chris Gose's Peru journal, "World's Window," in which Gose & his partner are still seeking the desired ayahuasca ceremony, the following dream account is included:

> *Last night I dreamt again of the ayahuasca spirit. A group had gathered in an open-air space beneath a wooden casita propped up on stilts, with one side opened out onto a sort of lagoon or lake. We partook of the brew and sat in anticipation of the oncoming surge. I felt myself being pulled up on a sort of tether, floating up and above the casita and being almost sucked into the vast and empty sky. Then a complete shift in consciousness and I suddenly find myself completely removed from the domain of the physical and sensory. Everything is dark, but my consciousness is illumined within the darkness without any sense of physical body—all senses in complete suspension. The darkness is like a large and warm velvet blanket, welcoming and spacious, and has become the object of a light that is beyond light/darkness.*

An illumined bodiless consciousness in a large, warm, welcoming darkness. No fear, no blindness. He continues:

> *The sense of illuminated darkness was striking and somehow absolute, touching something ineffable and removed from the narrow chinks of the sensory and bodily. Not void, nor nihilistic in any sense, but empty of any discernable singularity or substance. Not even truly "dark," but light of an altogether different variety.*

Rather than reacting badly to the darkness, or it striking out at him, or just the fear of it, here there is union, synthesis. The dark comforts, the man is comforted. At least in a dream of a bodiless beyond.

Strangely somewhere between these two pieces is Conrad Aiken's short fiction "Silent Snow, Secret Snow." A surreal horror story of a boy's—plunge? descent? entry?—into the "*long white waves*" of a "*coming*" darkness. A "*snow*" fills his mind that is repelled by the light of an opening door—almost some *other* kind of synthesis versus Gose's dream—a smothering white blanket of darkness. It concludes:

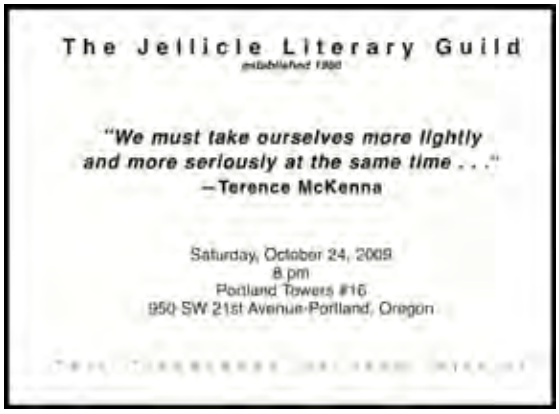
> *"Listen!" it said. "We'll tell you the last, the most beautiful and secret story—shut your eyes—it is a very small story—a story that gets smaller and smaller—it comes inward instead of opening like a flower— it is a flower becoming a seed—a little cold seed—do you hear? we are leaning closer to you—"*
>
> *The hiss was now becoming a roar—the whole world was a vast moving screen of snow—but even now it said peace, it said remoteness, it said cold, it said sleep.*

Evil? I don't know. I think so but I'm not sure. But Jim Burke III raises this whole matter back to a place I find more reassuring:

*We All Become Stars When We Die . . .*
*(then again, maybe stars become all of us . . .)*

To become the light that balances the universe, gives every seer a lovely canvas to behold each night, ahh, *yes*.

Unrelated, at least I think, to the darkness/light theme are the surreal visual treats of Catfish Rivers (aka Jeremy Kilar). Like AbandonView, I'd met him online, originally working with him as a DJ on SpiritPlants Radio. By October 2009, his "River's Edge" program had been on air three months. These crossings between radio & press would continue to happen; I would look for such opportunities. A person's imagination, once ignited by serious art-making in one form, can prove itself able in others.




Happily, *Cenacle* 70's release was tied to the return of the Jellicle Literary Guild, dormant since the previous December. In a note sent to members in advance of the meeting, I explain:

> *It's been many months since there was an email regarding Jellicle Guild activities—because there were no activities—after last December's 20th anniversary meeting, nothing new happened. A combination of reasons: after reviving the Guild in 2008, & hosting 6 meetings here in Portland, I was a little burnt. I'd forgotten the energy they require. Too, I was juggling a new job & a number of projects. It seemed a good time to pause—as much as 2008 seemed a good time to revive. Pause, think, resume when it was time . . . . It's time.*

Three things I am getting about this Jellicle Guild revival: 1) it's smart to engage people's involvement from near & far; 2) it's smart to take advantage of the new technologies to do this; 3) the pool of participants needs to be replenished, as much as the DJs for the radio, & contributors for *The Cenacle*.

Tying the Jellicle Guild & *Cenacle* together is a good move, gives each a more solid foundation & purpose. These projects are ever strengthened by closer ties. When I read my new poems at the Jellicle Guild, read them also on my radio show, publish them in *The Cenacle*, & also at *ElectroLounge*, eventually in book form, this spreads them as far & wide & variously as I can. And I use this template for the work of others too.

This meeting was attended in person by Kassi, Victor Vanek, & me. Among the pieces we read to one another were poems from Galway Kinnell, this as part of bringing Burning Man Books 2009 to the meeting. Funny how the two projects crossed paths early in 1999-2001, & then in 2008-2009 at the end. They will cross again, in further forms, down the road. Victor brought some "Japanese death poems" and some poems by Billie Collins. Kassi read some E.E. Cummings, one of her favorite poets, & Judih Haggai's poems from *Cenacle* 70. I read from my *Many Musics* & my letter to Obama, also from *Cenacle* 70. I shot a little video of the meeting, to post to YouTube.com, & include, along with pictures & audio highlights, in my meeting review to the Jellicle Guild email list.

Victor & Kassi & I pushed the night long past the meeting's end, toward dawn watching the very funny BBC-TV show, *The Mighty Boosh.* It was a good resumption meeting. It has carried on.

In November I marked my radio show's sixth anniversary of broadcasting thrice monthly on SpiritPlants Radio & also, amazingly, a full year of running the station. From its devolution by October 2008 to being my show & the rest dead air—to the weekend schedule featuring my show & content I thought would go good on a psychedelic radio station—there now featured—additional to the psychedelic lectures, jazz & rock concerts, news programs—over a dozen DJs who created original shows. From the U.S. Canada, & Europe, unobstructed by commercials or strictures, these DJs made, & make, programs that are excitingly eclectic, strange, mixing in all kinds of music, words, interviews, & unclassifiable sounds. These shows included: "The River's Edge with DJ Catfishrivers"; "Hi-Fi Hippie Show with the 2 Zillion-Year-Old Hippie"; "Radiohuasca with DJ Zart"; "Electro Mind Melt with DJ Ignitrance"; "Regional Cuisine: Deep Fried Roots Music with DJRL"; "Imaginary Chains with DJ Flip"; "Creepshow with DJ AbandonView"; "Under Eternity Blue with DJ Arkstar"; "Action Potential with DJ Abrahm," & "Shamanic Freedom Radio with OpaqueLens." I was so proud of this station that I talked OpaqueLens into interviewing me about it on his radio program.

It's a lot of work to keep it going but I believe that radio is a vital piece in the Scriptor Press puzzle. It creates unique opportunities for collaboration, & its reach is world-wide, is powerful. Music & the human voice connect one to another in some ways more potent than any others.

It's funny that until the day, the moment you part a person, or a place, or the like, the possibility of new delight, or lesson, even revelation, remains. And of course there are memories & dreams thereafter to recall, refigure. *Cenacle* | 71 | December 2009 is rife with images & words derived from the trip Kassi & I took to the Oregon coast the weekend after that October Jellicle Guild meeting, to stay in a motel room in a town called Tillamook. We skipped work obligations that Friday & drove west from Portland, stopped first at Cape Meares, beheld the great rocky view of the shoreline & the magnificent Octopus Tree, & the lovely old lighthouse.

In our time together on the West Coast (by 2009 it was five years), we'd not gone to the ocean once. Neither Seattle nor Portland is really a coastal city. We spent that Saturday by the ocean side, walking for miles (all of Oregon's coast is open to everyone), Kassi taking pictures,

me writing & writing. Great rocks, pieces of driftwood, strange foamy surf. It was magic. *Cenacle* 71 is haunted by this visit. Its front cover (of Buster & Wonder Duckee), its back cover (my silhouette), & its epigraph are all from that day at the ocean side near Tillamook, Oregon. We included a gallery of pictures Kassi took of the lighthouse at Cape Meares—& many others she took scatter through the issue's pages.

Three of my *Many Musics, Fifth Series* poems were written that weekend by the ocean side. One of them, "Ways of the Waves," is excerpted to decorate a picture of the crashing waves near Tillamook, & concludes:

> *There's gift in*
> *this twist of a moment, of being something in*
> *this world, giving something to this world, &*
> *feeling its sure recall when the best has been spent.*

Reaching for prose peaks, a bare try to explain, my "Notes from the Northwest" remarks:

> *I wonder: is all of this proof of God's hand or the shape of that hand itself? In truth I find I need no proof nor does the idea of God interest me. Whatever all of this is, where from, where bound, here it is, now. The fact of this world, whatever larger thing it beds in, whatever clock or rules it may operate by, the challenge is to shape one's faith complementary to one's questions, so each may breathe & flourish like this shore.*

& concludes:

> *We watch the sunset as its calliope of colors breaks & re-makes our hearts. Not just the moon & its gravity, but the sun & its heat electrifying this world with life. The mysteries stretch ever outward, one affecting another, each many, many all, one in many in all, the hungry eye, the questing soul looks upward & does not see dead stars but live light, every night its arriving message, its reassurance that there is enough room in this universe & however many others for each to look deeper & deeper in & then turn, by hope or despair or both, outward, a single animate mite on a noisy little rock, but also more, so much more, ever more, & still ever more.*
>
> *Without answers, not an hour's or even a minute's certainty gained by our experiences, we nonetheless retreat to our motel room as two of the blessed, bearing high gifts that urge play, work, gratefulness, love, a proofless trust to keep breathing.*

We were given wonderful gift that weekend ocean side near Tillamook. Our eyes opened wide, our hearts deep. *Cenacle* 71 in part stands as a humble thank you, best to be offered in return.

Following into the rest of the issue, start with this haiku by Judih Haggai:

> *thoughts fly apart*
> *body unhinges*
> *a new leaf unfolds*

This leads me to the following passage in my "From Soulard's Notebooks":

> *Nobody knew ten years ago what was to come. There were fears of dependence on technology, skepticism of the helping hand of government. Those days, those years of the late 1990s, bear a kind of lazy innocence to them in retrospect's view. Perhaps the current tumults will appear apple-cheeked smiling one day sooner or later . . . .*
>
> *[Yet] what I come back to is a strange feeling of hope, not despair, in the unknown times ahead. The future is an infinite feast of possibilities, great ones & tragic ones, & I do not believe that anyone has taken sure control of this feast. That said, the idea of evolution cannot help but be a messy, sometimes incoherent thing. The feast of the future covers the world, & not every dish is sweet. Some dishes are empty, some bear poisons. Some dishes are larger than others.*

Both passages point toward change, the unknowableness of change, the power & force of change, its promise, its terror, new leaves & disasters both pending.

What was on my mind in the "Notebooks" elaborates on Judih's poem. The first decade of the new century flew apart, unhinged, almost from its beginning. Whatever happened on September 11, 2011 in New York City, Pennsylvania, & Washington D.C., the why & the how & the who of it, it flung bloody into plain view the hatreds deeply driving much of the ideologies of this world. Hate & violence ricochet back & forth, each response justifying the next response.

Thinking it through further, it seems to me that 9/11 buried any pretense toward the idea that these ideologies—religious, political, economic—can live & let live. The zealots of this world plainly mean to crush each other. And maybe this was always true. But for the long stretch of last century there seemed something else going on too. Negotiations, peace summits. Demilitarized zones. There do not seem to be many bargaining tables anymore.

And yet, new leaves "unfold"? Though I do not advocate anarchism, or think chaos is necessary, I do think it's better when the cards are laid plain. If one's government doesn't care for peace, makes no real solid gesture toward it, then it remains the government on the majority populace's concession to that stand. If we want a better, more peaceful world, we know that our war-making governments will have to be changed.

So the new leaves, in this case, are our actions. The world has continued to fly apart, unhinge, since 9/11, change & change until it's hard to remember what other days were like. The new leaves will be *us*, what *we* do about the raw violence permeating this world—toward people, toward nature—done by governments ruling in *our* names, by *our* wills, with *our* consents. I'd wager that saying no to all this will prove easier as more do.

Ric Amante's "Luna Questionnaire," accompanied by a graphic derived from that day ocean side near Tillamook, asks, in part: *"Why is the salt of compassion / so often added late?"* This line leads me into Chris Gose's "World's Window." Gose discusses over & over again how much he seeks such a thing: compassion. Something like . . . affectionate understanding. Here is the heart of Gose's experience when he finally drinks the long-sought ayahuasca:

> *The Medicine posed a question that has since become something of a personal koan for me: "Is pursuit of the Truth worth all of the suffering and uncertainty?" My answer would be "yes,"*

> *but this answer does not penetrate into the depths of the question for me . . . . Specifically, this question allowed me to probe the difficulties that have evolved in my relationship with my father, suggesting a link between my own struggle and my place within the revolution of consciousness as it is being mediated by the Medicine . . . . The Medicine is the infinite light of compassion and healing, the one and great spiritual Apocalypse that is the central gravity and mystery of life, especially our own lives. The Purge is the manifestation of the Medicine within the time-bound dimension of cause-and-effect karmic conditioning and personal suffering—the light comes to bear on the darkness, and the darkness is purged. The alchemists refer to this central mystery of the path of the wounded healer as the* Mysterium Coniunctionis*, the* Lapis Lazuli*, the* Uniao Spiritus*. The two become one and we are healed.*

Things fly apart. Body unhinges. New leaves unfold. Though late, the salt of compassion is finally added.

Compassion is at the shadowy heart of Joseph Conrad's short fiction "Secret Sharer." A ship's new captain takes on board a troubled mysterious stranger he feels deeply bonded to, compelled to protect. He finally sees the stranger safely on his way:

> *Walking to the taffrail, I was in time to make out, on the very edge of a darkness thrown by a towering black mass like the very gateway of Erebus—yes, I was in time to catch an evanescent glimpse of my white hat left behind to mark the spot where the secret sharer of my cabin and of my thoughts, as though he were my second self, had lowered himself into the water to take his punishment: a free man, a proud swimmer striking out for a new destiny.*

Finally, to *Labyrinthine*. Since I'd decided to write it with no set length or time, as rarely was true before for such long works, the door was wide open. I kept unleashing new ideas as they came to me.

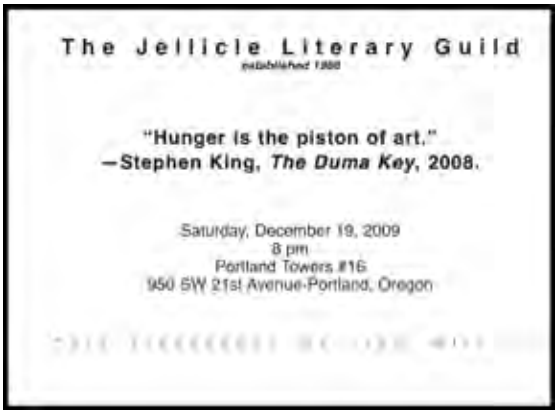
One was **RemoteLand**, a fixtional film vaguely inspired by David Lynch's surreal masterpiece of ontological horror, *Inland Empire*, but one I wanted to take other places:

> *The film is called* **Remoteland** *& some say its origins trace to a cancelled cult TV show & its lunatic fans. What happened with that show was a tragedy & the chance that this new film is related pretty much dooms its success. A few will go to see it, hoping for more lurid themes, but it will likely close in a month or less.*

**RemoteLand** moves, changes, there are versions, & new versions, & it isn't clear what is its motivation or who are its makers. It is a *living, changing* film, & a cult forms around it.

This living, changing idea is reflected in the book as a whole:

> *What then, next, a story becomes aware of itself, & changes without me, what then, next? Each character is caught in a tangle of events & decisions, each commanded some moments & dragged along by others, each his passing & deepening labyrinthine story, toward what? Any? Yes, toward—for fixtion allows a propulsion, a shaping & speeding of events toward—much as there are tangents, there is a toward, or towards*




I think *Labyrinthine* & *The Cenacle* make each other better. There is no other place, no other vehicle, I could imagine where *Labyrinthine* would fit as well as in *The Cenacle*, & conversely, *Labyrinthine* is a crucial buttress of many issues that began with *Cenacle*s 70 & 71 in 2009, & have continued since.

The last press event of 2009 was the 21st anniversary Jellicle Literary Guild meeting, on December 19. This one was Kassi & me, for seven hours. We pretty much read back & forth from *Cenacle* 71 & other sources. Kassi also read from Howard Zinn, Dave Eggers, Adrienne Rich, & Barack Obama. I read from a biography of folk-rock singer Phil Ochs. It was high fun in many ways.

It was the end of our last year living out West. Last year going to Burning Man. I can only remark that the shiny bauble one reaches toward shifts & eludes, this way, that way, some other. One does gather a few surer shards along the way. Mostly I keep moving, & keep singing to tell.

* * * * * *

*Nathan Horowitz*

**Self-Portrait in 20 Dreams**

Orange sky. Black earth. Everything is in silhouette, black. A tyrannosaurus rears up to attack a triceratops. The triceratops falls backwards into a pit in the earth.

(Early 1970s)

I have been selected to be one of the first ten children to fly on a rocket to the moon. We all ride up an elevator inside the rocket to a round room at the top. I realize I've forgotten the lunch my mother packed for me. I dash downstairs and out of the rocket and snatch up the brown paper bag. The rocket blasts off. I weep inconsolably. It occurs to me that they'll put me on the next rocket and I feel better. Then I wake up and realize there isn't going to be a next rocket, and I weep inconsolably again.

(Early 1970s)

I have fallen asleep with a hair on my tongue. In my dream, my tongue becomes a river, and two Indians in a birch bark canoe paddle down it to remove the hair.

(Early 1970s)

I'm looking at a winter landscape, a wide valley with a cozy village. Snow is drifting down in soft clumps, only it's not white, it's all colors of the rainbow, the most beautiful sight imaginable.

(Mid-1970s)

I'm bobbing up and down in cold water, in the ocean off the coast of Maine, near a small island where I can see a lighthouse through the mist. Around me is an extended family of about a dozen mer-people, mermaids and mermen of all ages. They discuss with me one of their customs, then request that I couple with the 12-year-old daughter. I wrap my arms and legs around her. She's very cold but we both enjoy the lovemaking—both of us on the cusp of puberty.

(1980)

In a hallway in my elementary school, I drink a cup of opium. It has the consistency of egg nog and a narcotic flavor I haven't tasted anywhere else. I float up five feet off the floor. I'm mortified that someone will discover me doing this, but everyone walks by without noticing.

(1981)

A nuclear war wipes out almost all of humanity. I'm walking through a devastated city. I see the corpse of a man I know to have been a drug dealer, and I kneel and go through his pockets. One tiny yellow pill, a hit of mescaline. I eat it. I'm walking down the block when two jaguars stride out of a deserted general store. They're brother and sister. They talk to me telepathically, saying they want me to mate with the sister.

(1983)

Sitting in a Japanese indoor garden in my elementary school with my stepfather, who's deep in meditation, and a member of the Ku Klux Klan, who's wide awake and aggressive. My name is called, and the Klansman says something about Jews. My stepfather opens his eyes for a second, mutters something to the Klansman, and drifts off again. I'm scared that the Klansman will beat me to death, then skin me and dress in my skin, using it as a disguise to walk around killing people, while I watch, a horrified and powerless ghost, following my murderer down the curved and vertiginous curving streets of my hometown, the skies red and green, flashing through all the seasons, walking up Olivia Street three paces behind him, staggering and puking in the road beside a parked car.

(1987)

Into a crowd of people at some dumb event tumble a woman and I, naked, somersaulting together very fast and having sex at the same time. I'm thinking, "They're probably not sure what they're seeing, because we're rolling so fast, so we won't get in trouble for this."

(1988)

I'm on a bus full of people about my age, from different countries, most of them oddballs, weird-looking. Two women were hideously disfigured, one even worse than the other. She has to fish around with tiny metal hooks inside her open wounds to find things: the wounds are like pockets for her. Various parts of her are wired together. It's impossible to imagine what she might once have looked like. The bus stops in the north parking lot of Burns Park School and people start getting out. Five of them are punked-out Britons, including a chubby woman with purple hair, black clothes, heavy eye makeup, lots of silver hoops in her ears. I say "I gather from what you say that you've all attempted suicide, and everyone else on the bus too?" "Well, at least all of us from the British contingent," says the woman. "Me too, kind of," I say. Later, I'm on a space ship, and I have infections under the skin of my forearms. The skin of the left one splits and a baby caiman wriggles out. Then a woman makes a slit in the right. She pinches the flesh and a growth emerges, diseased flesh with tiny plants growing in it, about five shoots. "What are those?" I ask. "Corn plants," she says.

(1993)

There's been a mix-up in the spirit world: a black man who should be dead is alive, and I, who should be alive, am dead. I'm in a pretty neighborhood of thatched huts with white walls. A nice black priestess performs a ritual on me to correct the mistake. I'm skeptical. Then I wake up – alive!

(1997)

I'm working on a PhD in Comparative Religion. I'm in my threadbare apartment; there are textbooks on my futon, which is on the floor. A woman from my past is present. I'm trying to explain to her why it's not a good idea for us to get involved. I bring up excuses, but it's really that I'm studying shamanism and have to be celibate. She transforms into another woman from my past, with a similar build but of a different race, and I'm trying to explain why it *is* a good idea for us to get involved, but she isn't buying it, because she knows I'm studying shamanism and have to be celibate. She walks out the door. I sigh. I pick up a metal bowl of

water and a metal spoon with a hole in the middle and go over to the small white octopus that lives in a depression in the bare wooden floor near the wall. I kneel down and begin, with difficulty, to spoon water over the octopus, which is so dry that it rustles like dry leaves. It raises one tentacle in the sign of the spiral, and fixes me with a look from one spiral eye.

(1998)

I go into a small import store. The store is full of a fragrant, smoky fog, so it's nearly impossible to see the scanty merchandise – Persian carpets, brass knick-knacks. I can see the proprietor through the fog. He's very short and old and bent over and whiskery; he smiles at me under his long nose. I tell him I can't see the merchandise with all this fog. He takes me to the center of the store and has me close my eyes and turn around three times. When I open my eyes, the fog is still there, but he's younger, and his whiskers are black. His bare feet are very hairy, and between the base of his right big toe and the base of its neighbor is a triangular growth of thick hair that looks like a woman's pubic hair. I tear my gaze away from that, mildly shocked. He mentions something about his family, and I can see his wife, who's wearing a headscarf, and their two young daughters, but I can only see them as reflections in a large mirror near a window. I decide this is a bad sign: these people are spirits. I exit the store.

(2001)

I'm inside of a candlelit gypsy caravan, looking up the definition of chaos in a huge dictionary. The air sparkles. The open page curves all the way up the wall, covered with self-transforming words. Many of the words are now brazil nuts shaped like five-pointed stars; they prove to be both easy to open and delicious.

(2003)

On a small island in a river, I'm discussing Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* with a student of mine. Neal Cassidy appears. Because he has eaten hallucinogenic mushrooms and I am dreaming, we can see each other. He doesn't say much, but he's friendly, smiling. I tell my student that *On The Road* is an important and groundbreaking book because through it, one can have actual contact with the souls of the characters.

(2007)

I'm an American officer in the last weeks of World War Two. We capture a German solder and I order my men, "Find out how many words he knows and then kill him."

(2008)

I'm staying at a hostel in the castle where Rilke wrote "Duino Elegies." Some people are trying to convince me that I'm dead, but I ignore them. I order a single kidney bean for lunch and they say, "Don't you think you would have more of an appetite if you were alive?"

(2009)

I'm hanging out with a friend when a kid comes up to us with an apple that has been peeled and sliced, and he says that his parents did it. We understand that the apple is his brain, and that his parents have lobotomized him. So we set out to photograph the apple without alarming him. We will turn the photos in to the police. But eventually we realize, "Wait a minute, it's just an apple."

(2010)

I'm one of a minority of people who are something like autistics, but our disability – if it is a disability – is physical as well as psychological: we are weightless. It's nighttime. A dozen of us are in a public park under streetlights, scavenging potentially useful discarded objects from garbage cans and dumpsters. Some normal people approach and we throw ourselves through gaps in the bushes that line the sidewalk, then hide there, floating, until the normals leave. I need to go out among the normals, so I meet with our leader, a tough-minded woman in her fifties. She has a collection of four three-dimensional postcards that she uses to explain our condition so that others will understand. She gives me two of them. One has several panels. It shows some of us as children being investigated in a laboratory. We're alone with white rats that run through a maze. Their noise is no problem, but as soon as the white-coated scientists come in and begin to speak, we become agitated and try to run away. The second three-dimensional postcard is a photo of a group of us as children standing in a circle for protection and consolation, floating about a foot off the ground, with our heads down and our feet straight up in the air.

(2011)

I'm in a dark field in Vienna at night. A white bull is running back and forth from one end to the other and my wife picks up a sledgehammer to try and stop it by striking it in the forehead. A blue whale is nearby, surfacing in the field to breathe and submerging again. A dozen Viennese poets and actors wearing shorts and shoes and otherwise completely covered in red paint begin jogging while chanting some verses by a dead poet. I try to dash ahead of them and get photos, but they're moving too fast: every time I turn around with the camera, I'm in the midst of them.

(2012)

* * * * * *

*Charlie Beyer*

# A Travel to Belize

**[Journal]**

(Continued from *Cenacle* | 80 | April 2012)

**To the End of the Road**

A Mexican rabble, who is our "guide," rides on the bumper, shouting directions up to me on which way to go. It is, of course, not obvious. Have to stop at a fumigation station, where they do a thorough job of spraying both sides of the truck and trailer with some green goo. 80 bucks Belize. Finally we're led to huge gate, locked, second in line. How that other guy got in front of us is unclear. A vendor sells breakfast burritos off his bicycle, but we're on the cigarette diet.

Behind the gate about a hundred yards is a huge warehouse of boring proportions. It is hot as we wait. Truck on, truck off. It is 8:45 by our Mexican time. We realize that Belize is an hour earlier so the gate ought to open soon. Set the clock back. Wait and wait. As the time approaches 9 Belize time, an exceedingly slow and fat fellow waddles out to the gate. He appears to have as much interest in his job as if he shoveling hippopotamus crap for a living. Languidly, he unlocks the huge gate and settles into his booth. So things are an hour behind prescription, it would seem. He informs me that I have to pay 125 dollars per document to the customs broker before leaving. I can just pay him, he tells me. I chose not to, waiting to see how things shake out. Through the gate, and into a big yard surrounded by a 12-foot-high fence that is buttressed all along its length by various wrecks. Here we must wait.

Lester come up and tells us that an inspector will verify our VIN numbers with the titles. He wears a light blue shirt with dark blue trousers. He'll take the titles now to get the paperwork started. They are reluctantly handed over. An hour passes. Finally a rotund white shirt-black pants fellow comes out. Goes to the first guy and spends what seems like a week with him. Evidently old friends. Then back into the warehouse. More waiting. We're dozing a little in the truck when there's a rap on the window. The inspector. Does the VIN check. Has me pop the hood and looks over the engine. Then back into the warehouse. Lester tells us we can do the animal quarantine paperwork now.

Into the warehouse. It is a vast gloom with various offices around the edges. We go into a tiny one on one side. The little room is air conditioned, which is nice. A quarantine official reviews our paperwork as we explain that some other necessary part of it was faxed down to them previously. He wears green pants and a light green shirt. He goes through a few piles of papers on his desk and can find nothing. Then makes a call to some other office, speaking in some mix of African and Spanish with an occasional English word thrown in. No hello or goodbye, just start talking and then hang up abruptly. They must have told him the paperwork went by their office and it must be there somewhere. He consults a superior who points out a folder pinned to the wall behind him. Digging through this, our animal paperwork is miraculously found. Another half an hour of making a few copies, signing in all the appropriate places, filling out some other form, stamping officially, and getting a hefty payment from us.

The entire bureaucracy here in Belize is very dear to these people. Based on some South African model, influenced by East Indian bureaucratic excess, and originating in British colonial corruption, the "cover your ass factor" has mushroomed into an almost endless miasma of signatures, stamps, triplicate of triplicates, verifications, and indecisive stalling. The computer has not infiltrated into this system yet, and all summations of payments are done on a small Casio adding machine. There are no Paperwork Reduction Act here, no efficiency analysis, no customer service consciousness, only grinding paperwork that is shuffled from one desk to another and treated as though it was sweaty gym socks. Everyone is color-coded for position. Specific colored shirt, specific colored pants. I'm sure some of the epaulets that decorate their shoulders denote their rank. I have seen this in the South African mining system, where each status level has a different uniform, and the wearer is even obligated to move to a different house with each promotion or demotion.

Lester glides over to us, now leaning against the concrete warehouse wall sweating, hoping to suck some cool out of it. We get our titles back and the news that all is in process. Soon, he says, the inspector for our truck-load of crap will come out to verify some damn thing, and we ought to pull the larger things off the top so its interior can be penetrated. He floats off with a lilting step, like an adolescent unsure how to walk in public. After each foot is planted, it is bounced up on its toe, giving the impression of an overall pogo stick gait. Lester is unfazed by the contorted convolutions of paperwork he must expedite—a passive look on his face, one would think he were wading in a seashore sunset.

We hotly pull the bikes and some other junk down from the truck, then do the AC thing inside, for us and the melted animals. We wait. Wait some more. I get out and talk to a guy next to us with two 100-pound pit bulls. He takes them over to the shade of some fence wreckage where they bark and bark. Sometime in the afternoon we locate Lester again. What the hell is going on? What is the interminable delay? The inspector came out, he says, but couldn't find us and the truck was not ready. What the hell? We pulled crap off the truck. We've been waiting in the truck. The inspector will come back later. We pull more crap down. Then go in the building to see the inspector. Tan shirt, brown pants. She is a huge woman, sitting behind a desk, bullshitting with some cronies. Hard at work. We say we're ready now. She grunts and says we were not ready. Maybe, but we're ready now. She shrugs the shrug of dismissal and continues her palaver with the others lounging near her desk. Kim is getting furious. I can see the fat inspector's power trip maturing. The more we bug her, the longer this is going to take.

We wait, sitting on the concrete against the wall. In an hour, she waddles out with a clipboard and goes to some other truck, giving us a withering look. The fat power bitch look. Then back in for another half hour at the desk. I am called into an inner sanctum office and sat down with a white shirt, black pants. He has been surfing on the computer and says that the value of the hovercraft is astronomical. I protest that I built it out of scrap parts, and that it cost almost nothing. Also that dozens of these things are selling for 1500 to 2000 dollars. After much back and forth, it is valued at about 4000. The truck is valued at 6900 US—900 more than I paid for it ten years ago. I have a *Kelly Blue Book* print-out showing it's only worth 1500, but he says he has to go by the GET guidebook the government uses. Everything is three letters in this country. A neurotic compulsion to conform to a numismatic theological trinity. My paperwork is thrown in some random heap, and I'm back to waiting against the wall.

An hour later, Rita, the corpulent inspector, wanders out. She strikes up flirtatious conversation with a swarthy Guatemalan in some unintelligible language. I sense that he's shining her to get the benefit of her sympathetic assessment of value for his load. Seems to be working. I'd rather court a 200-pound tick. You'd need a garbage truck to take her to the drive-in movie, if

there was one. After she assesses his load, gives him her cell phone number. Goes back inside. Rita is fucking holding things the hell up, large. In another half an hour she comes out, with a huge sigh of reluctance to have to do her job. She comes over to inspect and assess our truck contents. It's all over in thirty seconds. She could care less. Everything down as miscellaneous personal items. Value: 400 dollars.

Back to Lester, who is floating a few inches off the floor near the big bosses' office. A crowd of hot and irritated cargo carriers are barraging him. He has a Buddha-like smile of benevolence. A cool mist seems to be coming off him, as if the freezer door were opened on a hot day. Eventually he gives me his attention. Everything is in order, just waiting for a signature of one of the big bosses. There is no problem with the boat. Back to waiting. In another hour we are presented with a new mound of paperwork. Go to the cashier and pay the duty. A line. Old friends or relatives blathering endlessly at the window with the cashier. Finally get to pay a massive price, about a grand US. Then must pay Lester about 150. Oh but there is a problem.

"You must have a license for the boat."

"But I have everything registered and titled."

"Yes, but you must get a Belizean boat license."

Have to go to Belmopan to get it. The boat must stay here and there are overnight fees etc., can't leave the yard with it.

Still blazing hot. Unhook the hover and trailer, wedging it in next to some dilapidated cars whose owners chose to never come back for them. Their overnight charges must be in the millions, judging by the tangle of vines growing through the windows.

"OK, can we go now?"

"Yes, all is in order, you can go."

Finally. To the exit gate, sans hover. The guard analyzes the paperwork.

"You cannot go. You have not paid the duty on the contents of the truck."

Back into the maze. Wait at the cashier for the fellow to take a half-hour crap, then his cousin has to catch up on happenings in Orange Walk. In an hour I pay another few hundred. Back to the gate. Cleared to go this time. Then to the insurance company, conveniently the first biz on the right. Dinked for another 50 US to drive the truck in Belize. Finally cleared and on the road.

Now the dark thing. It's about five in the afternoon. No way in hell to get 350 miles south on unmarked roads. Corozol is fifteen miles away. The road goes through the center of town. A standard vintage town, no building over one story, somewhat colorful, but shabby. Signs are in English, which is nice.

Through town. No visible hostel. I see a sign for the Miracle Hotel down a dirt road and head off the highway for that. It is an old Victorian house, alone in a field, Rasta people lounging all around the outside. Albert the proprietor is nice enough, though he looks like he can fall over at any time due to the huge multi-colored bag on his head. There must be enough hair in there to make socks for the whole village. The room is fair with a weak AC unit. Albert doesn't mind that we have a menagerie of animals. Dog romps in the fields around the place, a thousand new smells and skittering things to make a symphony of delight. Animals settled, fed, chasing lizards in the room, we head for the bar.

No food. Have to drink dinner. In casual talk with Albert, the subject of ganja comes up. Presently, he reaches under the bar and hands me what appears to be a dried rat without the tail. The light is bad, the rum is kicking in. On inspection, mostly by nose, it is determined to be a huge bud of marijuana. This is nice, but no thanks for now. I have enough problems. The crime here is six months in jail, or 1000 US to pay your way out. Not too many of these bubbleheads appear to have a thousand US dollars. The prison must be crammed with pot smokers. We take beers back to

-89°
-88°
18°
17°
16°
Chetumal
Bahia de Chetumal
Mexico
Corozal
Corozal
Orange Walk
Ambergris Cay
San Pedro
Belize
Orange Walk
Hick's Cays
Belize City
Northern Lagoon
Belize
BELMOPAN
Southern Lagoon
Turneffe Islands
San Ignacio
Cayo
Dangriga
Victoria Peak
(1 120 m)
Stann Creek
Glover Reef
Caribbean Sea
Doyle's Delight
(1 124 m)
Maya Mts
Big Creek
Toledo
Punta Gorda
Gulf of Honduras
Sarstoon
Sarstún
Bahia de Amatique
Guatemala
km
0 5 10
Puerto Barrios
Puerto Cortés
Honduras

the room, which clatter on the tile floor. The small cat is all over the room like an electron trying to catch a blue striped lizard. The bed and the exhaustion catch up to us. A nice night with reggae thumping downstairs and tropical birds chirping out the window.

The relief of night over too soon. A lounging Rasta claims he's been watching the truck all night, although he wasn't there when I came down with the first load of animals. I give him a few bucks anyway. Back on the road. But now we feel safe. The land not hostile, pavement fair, directions easy, as there is only one road. A dozen miles past Corozol, the road devolves to dirt, then huge rutted and mud-holed country road. Sugar cane is fifteen feet tall on both side.

Too far we go on this before we realize we have gotten on a parallel road to the highway—having stupidly gone straight where the unmarked cutoff was. The good news is that the road rejoins the highway in another 20 miles. We decide to tough it out, but regret the decision more than a few times before we find pavement again. Back on the slab. Barreling along. Local instructions are to cut a right after the police check station to Barrel Boom, thereby bypassing the nightmare of Belize City.

Do the check-point, pulled over and questioned at length, but with no dire result. The turn off is ten miles past this, rather than just on the other side as informed. Eventually to Belmopan, where further bureaucracy prevents getting the license for a few days, needing signatures and the usual delays. On down the road, now into the "forgotten land." The Maya mountains are beautiful and lush, palms and mysterious trees leaning over the road. On and on it goes, through villages in abundance, bicycles populating the sides, the people ever standing along it, waiting, waiting, for what unknown. Places are kept well in Belize, garbage at a minimum. On and on we go, ever south. And now the evening upon us again.

Finally into Punta Gorda, the end of the road. We stop at the property we bought and hike into it. All is wet and dripping. Kim is quiet, peering into the dark of the jungle trees. Where is the ocean? What is this? Disappointment is all over her. We are a block from the sea, I explain, but this does not appease the reality of the dank twisted tangle of vegetation. The dank moist air. We head over to the hostel of my friend. His wife grumpily greets us. Yes, there is a room, but no animals allowed. This we cannot do, the animals need out.

Back to the property. I ask the neighbor for permission to drive across her lawn to get next to the place. Larry with an adjoining property has a house started with an elevated floor. Now the dark is on us. We hastily set up the tent under this elevated cement floor. The bugs are rampant, biting the hell out of us. The bedding soggy, the tent a sour pit full of animals, of which we are as they are. Tomorrow will be better. We'll build stairs to get up on top of the platform, off this bug ridden ground. We sleep in exhaustion, again. Now at the destination's end, in this strange land, this strange place, discomfort still on us like plastic wrap on a microwaved burrito. Creatures without rustle and squawk all around. This first night in our new land, a grumpy dud.

**The Forgotten Land**

Dawn as black as the inside of a body bag. Our bio clocks say we've slept enough. Roosters crow in the neighborhoods around us. Busses screech their brakes and accelerate as they maneuver the highway topes, collecting workers for the days labor on some dirt-and-brush project. Different bird talk comes randomly from the trees. Each sound is clear, distinct, unencumbered with the white noise that deadens sounds in the Northern urban. Soon a dog barks. Then another to answer that. And another to answer the second. Then a panic of barking, coming from all sides, from thirty yard-chained creatures, some desperate, some piteous, most angry, all in loud discussion of their plight and might.

The graying of the day finally. Stumbling amid our unloaded things from the evening before. There is no laughter, though there should be. No joy in the dirt and mud pit we find ourselves in. No cries of awe at the wonder of the muggy heat, the cloud of mosquitoes, the vegetation crowding all around, the glory of the jungle. The cats are now free. *Adapt or die, you little furry bastards.* Fifteen days crammed next to you in the truck has weakened our pampering pussy love. Weakened love all around. *You're on your own now, assholes* is the general attitude. With eyes as large as quarters, the cats tiptoe around this weird vegetated place, smells of monsters all around. The dog on a rope after the third time of going over and working the rich widow's chained dogs into a foaming lather with her plump city scent.

I find the little gas camp stove and get us some Mexican instant coffee hot in questionably clean cups. This feels better, but the bodily urges are stirred, an intestinal relaxing from days of truck cab compaction. It's the woods and shovel program. My venture is first through the spine-covered brush. How fast can this happen before the mosquitoes puncture my delicate parts. Not fast enough. A six-stab shit has me scratching in all the wrong places. I secretly relish the malevolent thought of Kim's perforating sojourn. How long can she hold it? A second cup of coffee is mixed to contemplate the day's labors ahead.

Presently, the dog erupts again in an apoplexy of barking. A tall skinny fella approaches us on the trail out of the jungle. We do not berate the dog its sonic exclamation. This is what we want the dog to do. Terrorize everybody. Let them know there are gnashing fangs associated with this pile of white people stuff.

"Good morning-morning . . . sueahh."

"Good morning to you," we reply.

"Ahh comes heah every day to be right wit Jah. Dis is my jungle place."

"Yes, well it looks like we've taken over this place."

"Dis all right, I just sits heah." He nestles into a dirt pile a dozen feet away. He is smoking a huge brown cigarette with the distinctive ganja smell.

"Ah sits here and watches the day goes by. Ah only wishes ah had some papers. Has to use dis banana leaf." He puffs a few, a blue cloud of smoke enveloping his head.

"Ah ams Orlando. I de only ones wid da weed arounds heah. Dem das wants de weed gots to sees me."

I offer him a cup of the Mexican coffee, which he accepts, then launches into a long mostly unintelligible dialogue about how he went over to gets some weed, but the lady and the man was a-fighting. Den she called the cops on de man and he was deported back to Nicaragua, and de woman stills a bitch buts she unloaded the rest o de weed on Orlando, so he's right wid Jah.

He opens the ubiquitous small black plastic bag of South America, which contains an ounce or more of some dark raw looking plant. He generously gives me a few grams. I take a puff off the banana leaf, to be ceremonious and assure him I am not a prig of some kind. Maybe it's the overall exhaustion or the underlying stress of our situation, but the puff immediately disorients me, forgetting where my coffee cup is, what I was to do next. So I sit down with the guest, content to bullshit randomly in half understood language.

Presently I become aware of the quick and heavy steps of the woman. If it were a plywood floor, it would be booming like a drum. This is the standard body language of the pissed-off woman. What can it be? Always the detective work to discern the mind of the female. Hmmm . . . OK, I get it. Sloth. My sloth! But I'm just being cordial. Why couldn't the 'tude be about theft or murder? Why always these indecipherable picayune whims of improper moral turpitude? OK, OK, with a groan I rise and set to work getting the chain saw in operation.

Now early morning. The plan is to make stairs and get all the crap up on the 10-foot

concrete platform by the end of the day. Now that the truck is empty, it's off to the lumber store. Nancy's it's called. Orlando has newish plastic sandals, a Walkman which he is intently absorbed in listening to reggae music, a clean newer shirt. He is saturated in ganja smoke and seems, for all intents and purposes, reasonably harmless. Then there is the dog, who I hope would spring to the aid of Kim if attacked with some malignant intent by our guest. Off to Nancy's lumber. The lumber here is not far removed from trees. Still green and cut generously but irregularly; a 2x4 looks more like a porch post. The truck is loaded with some boards as heavy and hard as concrete, and two huge beams for the stair sides. Back to the platform.

Orlando has been giving Kim a botanical tour of the surrounding jungle while the dog runs amok. There are cashew trees, lime trees, and dozens of medicinal plants that cure everything from malaria to cancer. Some are poison woods, whose sap burns the skin like acid, or worse yet, blinds you if you rub your eyes. The story is told of one white man who sat on a recently sawed poison wood stump for lunch. The acid burned a meaty abscess through his posterior and killed him. Oddly, the antidote tree always grows close by. A thin red barked tree, crooked and rarely bigger than your wrist, called Peely Bwana because of the red peeling bark, similar to paper. It reminds the locals of the burned red white man who's skin peels relentlessly. Orlando points out that the bark can also be used to roll ganja.

Setting to work with the square, felt pen, and chain saw, I lay out the stairs. My god, the wood is as hard as plastic and cuts about the same. It is tremendously hot. Sweat sheets off me, dripping as though I just stepped out of a lake, but without the cooling refreshing quality. My pants are soaked with the effusion, and I feel like I'm about to keel over, but still I must toil on. Must get the camp set up on the platform and all the crap up there before the night thieves pack everything away. Orlando sits in the shade, puffing endlessly. He helps only if I ask him with some ridiculously heavy part.

Late in the afternoon, the step supports are up and the steps nailed down. Finally on top. It is breezy and airy up there. Sweep the leaves and accumulated debris off the sides, set up the tent, and start hauling all the thousand things up. Orlando sets up one of the camp chairs on top and lights up a fresh reefer as we toil everything up the new access. Numerous people are passing by. Larry's place is on the main trail cutting thorough the jungle. Workers from the rich widow come by and get emphatic about the poor connection of the top of the stairs to the platform.

"Bali wood no strong. Ita cracka. Must have support. Will crong bong down, a-smacha. *Mucho mas*." I am polite, but not energetic to do any thing about it.

I feel rather a-smasha already. In fact, I am roasting and semi-delirious. The largest worker fellow had been going on about the "T" brace that needs to be under the stairs. Finally he rallies a few others and they build one, fitting it tightly under the middle of the span. I am most grateful. These people are alright, me thinks. I try to take time to converse and be cordial. Kim is getting frantic to get all the stuff up on the platform. It is getting dark as it always does . . . too early.

"Kim," I explain, "we don't have to get every little thing up here. Just the most liftable. The most obvious. We do have the dog, which is barking viciously at everybody." Finally, dusk descended, she acquiesces and sets about puttering on top.

Now dark, and the situation of how to dislodge our comfortable guest. He is apparently content to sleep in the chair in what could be construed as our new living room. Of course, the job falls to me, with the scowling woman in the shadows. Somehow I convey that we want to wash up and go to bed and that he should trundle off back into the jungle leaves whence he came.

At last, we are alone, our empire of American commodities secure, just us to contemplate where the hell we are. We wash in a bucket from "well" water, which is a rain water hole in the ground below us. I am fairly dubious of its microbial concentration, advising Kim not to get any

in her mouth. Certainly not toothbrush quality. As a final act of glory, I get one of the LED lights hooked up to a battery and life is illuminated. The bedding has dried a bit during the day. The nest is an oasis of rest after a roasting day of labor. A mild feeling of contentment comes over us with this hard-won peace. Kim is smiling. The cats are on jungle prowl.

Morning comes with a troop of parrots squawking and fighting in the trees around us. Wonderful it is. And of course the morning dogs, answering miscellaneous roosters in the distance, to which our dog must answer, and soon the sweet talk of the jungle animals is drowned out in a cacophony of frantic barking dogs within a mile radius. The plan today is for me to go all the way back to the border to get the hovercraft. A necessary plan, though filled with worry about leaving Kim alone on the jungle trail. But after coffee, I'm off with the satchel of paperwork.

The country is beautiful though not particularly interesting. Reaching Belmopan before noon, I am surprised to find my boat license ready to pick up. I feel dreadful, hot and cold and weak in the legs. I pull the truck under a tree and sleep for almost two hours. Still feel awful when I wake, but must go on.

A few miles past the cutoff that bypasses Belize City, there are some uniforms that are waving me down. Not knowing what legality this is, I stop. A black uniformed thug opens the passenger door and jumps in. Another six clamber into the pickup bed. OK, this is it. I'm screwed now. This must be the Belizean equivalent of the Mexican police mugging. I'll be directed to some side road and whacked for everything, the swamp and vines overgrowing what is left in the mud.

But it turns out these are hitchhikers. I was passing the prison and these are guards getting off work. The frantic road waving is the Central American method of asking for a ride. No thumb. My surprising guests are friendly enough, as most are here. The half dozen settle around in the truck bed as though they were getting ready for the Super Bowl game on TV. I am roasting with fever now. My legs seem paralyzed. I have to lift my leg by the pant leg to step on the brake. On we go through the mundane flat land with my cargo of turnkeys. We come to a police check-point and are waved through, the uniforms recognizing their professional brethren. A few stops at side roads to let out passengers, and now dusk again.

I roll into the town of Orange Walk, about sixty miles south of the northern border crossing. Burning up now, stopping at the first hotel I see, Hu Wang's. I can barely get out of the truck, and shuffle along the sidewalk, holding the wall like a drunk. The Wangs are barely able to communicate with me, but finally the paperwork is filled out and a bar of soap and a "wowel" is given to me. The room is upstairs, which is a lengthy process to ascend to, each step having to manually lift my leg. I am in psychic agony about the paralysis, something bizarre and unknown to me. Mrs. Wang is concerned, which is nice, but irreverent.

The room about the size of a large closet, a ceiling fan paddling the torpid air, just a sheet for the bed, bars on the window, and the evening bedlam outside. I collapse in feverish exhaustion. The next twelve hours are a writhing of sweat and bizarre dreams, the secret bodily process trying to burn out the invading microbe or whatever dengue drudge that has assailed me. The morning finally comes, the body wrung out like a bucket mop. A shower in a space the size of a vertical coffin; no room to retrieve the dropped soap. A search for food in town proves hopeless until I at last locate a Mayan fruit seller. The wild oranges are reviving as my body chemistry greedily absorbs the vitamin C. On again now, to the northern border.

The road is a plague of bicycles going in all directions, but eventually they thin out as the cane fields begin to dominate the landscape. I arrive at the border around nine, thinking I'm an hour late. But not much to my surprise, the gate has not been opened yet. Eventually inside, looking for Leroy, or whatever the hell his name was. Nowhere around, although he claimed he was there every day. I eventually hook up with another customs agent and the customary hours of

wait commence.

The papers are here, the papers are there, this official needs to sign them, that one needs to stamp them . . . how anything gets done here is unknown to me. I use the time to hook up the hovercraft trailer. Using my bumper jack, I draw a small crowd. The jack is the most coveted item in Central America. Some offer to buy it from me on the spot. No more tossing it in the back of the truck; it is number one on the klepto list around here. Inside the hover is all manner of rotting putrid food. The cooler is like an overdue casket from Calcutta. Important papers are mixed with all this, moldy mountains of illegible text. Amazingly, there is a trashcan where I can donate all this biology. When done, the flies move on to sweeter pastures.

Around 11:30, the customs agent informs me that all is in order. I had thought that all was in order when I left three days ago, but evidently mistaken. The bureaucrats would hate to miss a chance to obfuscate the process. Now to the pay-out-the-ass window. I'm sweating if I have enough money—all is in Yankee dollars. I get out of there with about fifty bucks. The thieves have charged me about 900 US to bring the boat in. Then to the insurance guy, a minor fleecing for a day's insurance on the trailer.

Now the road in earnest. 6 hours of daylight and 6.5 hours of driving. It's pedal mashing time. I pick up no hitchhikers; I'm on a mission to get back to Kim. If everything is . . . as it has been going, she will be raped and murdered, lying among the few things that they were unable to carry off. I'm stressing. I'm stomping the gas, passing like any good Mexican, irresponsibly, trying to get to Punta Gorda before night. I don't make it.

Blackness envelops the myriad standing on the roadside, the bicyclists, and the dogs alike. I can't see spit. Some times I see a silhouette of some masses riding or walking beside and in the road, but often I only catch a glimpse as my headlight illuminates them instantaneously . . . four feet from my 50 MPH bumper. What the hell are they doing out here anyway? Shouldn't they be in their smoky hovels slapping around a tortilla for the thirty family members? Maybe this nocturnal migration is coming over for dinner? I am terrified of hitting one of these people, though so burned out and ripped off I would enjoy bouncing a few off the grille. I think my tires can take running over a bicycle; they have pretty thick rubber. What the hell would I do then? Flee? Not a really great way to establish residency in a foreign country. I slow the truck to around 30, giving me a small margin of panic with each dark phantom.

At long last I arrive "home." Parking on the road now and hiking in the quarter-mile to the platform and Kim's presumed remains. But I can't walk; though better, my best is an interminable shuffle. I'd lose the twenty-meter hobble at the geriatric Olympics. In fifteen minutes I get to the bottom of the stairs and call out. Kim answers, She is fine. The dog barks. I crawl up the stairs pulling myself by my hands. Sweet home! Rest. Food.

I ask, "Are you alright? What has happened? Has there been a hoarde of visitors? People passing by? Has Orlando been here from dawn to dark?"

"No, no," she answers. "Nobody coming and going. I've been here all by myself. Moved the rest of our stuff up here. Just one visitor. What's wrong with you? Why did it take so long to walk from the truck?"

Paralyzed, I answer.

"Oh, that's too bad." Followed by silence. Not exactly the sympathy and massage I had in mind.

"Who was the visitor?" I ask.

"Chet Schmidt, the hostel owner. He says that we have to clear off of here by Monday morning. He has a crew coming to finish building on this place before Larry [the owner] shows up in a month. He says there will be six guys hauling cement and gravel up here, Spanish music

blasting on the radio, a flurry of activity. Everything must be cleared off and out of here."

The bastard, I think. This place has sat here in the jungle, descending into an archeological ruin for two years with nothing happening. Now suddenly when we need rest and release from kayos the most, he decides to start building. It is Friday evening. Monday is not far off. And just where the hell will we go?

Saturday morning, a beautiful mosaic of sunlight through the jungle trees. A half-dozen parrots fly into the trees nearby, like a moving monkey fight, defoliating the tree in a raucous argument. Other unknown birds are also aggressively announcing their position in the canopy. The dog wanders off to get the neighbor's chained canines into verbal expulsion. We brew the coffee and sip with extreme relish. One teaspoon, add hot water. In this land of coffee, there is only instant from Mexico.

Around seven, a thin malarial white man comes walking through the jungle trail, approaching the rain of dog barking without fear. He talks rapidly in a monotone, giving a usual greeting, some compliments on our camping ability, then launching into a social economic monologue about how the workers must be kept busy or they'll return to Guatemala, how Larry has left him money to work on the place and he's done naught to date, how he made a bad investment that has cleaned him out (unrelated), and a few newbie stories of how the ground is swarming with deadly snakes and venomous bugs.

He is never still, flitting about the platform, snapping his head from side to side as though a rock had just whizzed by his ear. He says he has a place where we could move a block away and begins to talk of monthly rent and power bills. He said the workers left the city water on for two days and it cost him 1200 dollars.

It's no use exaggerating to an exaggerator; I can smell the crap in that story. But city water sounds good. The cesspool dug in the jungle floor below us is not fit for the animals to drink. I tell him that we are robbed and penniless, but that I have skills and tools that I can use in trade with him. He seems satisfied with that as he jerks his head suddenly to the left. I'm wondering if ghosts are sneaking up on him.

We go over to the place a bock away. It is a construction site with the proverbial unfinished concrete building. Two stories, the lower level a dark morass of stacked construction supplies, but the second floor is of wood, with an expansive metal roof and some walls without windows. The back of this place is on level with a wall of flowering jungle trees, very airy and beautiful.

This will do quite nicely, I think. But don't tell him that. He is rambling on non-stop, about how this is not finished, that is done wrong, this is rotting from neglect, if then . . . then that could happen. We settle on my task of installing the sewage drain piping to start, then the toilets and water supply. Later still, the electrical wiring of the place. I'll keep a check on the Guatemalan water use and we'll worry about the electricity later.

Down stairs and in a hovel on the side is where the workers stay. An outhouse of disgusting factor 12.6 is in the yard. The filthy seat is loose on the rotted tilted throne. It is dark and decayed, the walls seething with black biting malignant insects. Who can imagine what's lurking in the hole, licking its incisors, waiting to clamp into a looming soft white ass. Apparently this is motivation to get a working toilet installed. Yes . . . I am motivated. Another five minutes on jungle Streptobacillus, mahogany wood, squalid workers existence, and loud Mexican music, then he's off in a panic to some other imagined appointment. So this is it. Evicted and re-housed all in one sentence.

I return to the platform, determined to do nothing for the rest of the day. Sunday we'll move. I tell Kim of our luxurious new living apartments. There is minimal excitement. Back to the Mexican coffee and bird calls, sinking in awe into an American camp chair. Contemplating this land, so far down here at the last of the road. From here, one must take a boat to another country,

this humanity hemmed in on all sides by the jungle. Here the Mayans have lived unmolested by the Spaniards and the rest of the world, and also unaided by any government, the British or the current Peoples Parties. Pirates used the coasts and islands to hide their treasure; slave ships unloaded Africans, Chinese, and East Indians here, Europeans mixed with the Arimi Indians . . . then this place was left alone. Forgotten by the world. Left here to stew in its poverty and interbreeding, becoming a semi-rebel land populated by the unwanted. Have we gravitated here because we are such people also?

Sunday I get the hovercraft off the trailer and it runs well in spite of its holes and torn skirt. I'll use it to shuffle the mound of possessions across the rich widow's lawn to the truck on the street, then ferry it to the new digs, packing it all upstairs. This process takes a week; where we had unloaded in two hours, now it seems endless.

No workers show up on Monday, but the downstairs of the new place is a bustle of activity, making rebar frames for Larry's place. Mexican music blares from below. By Friday we are re-entrenched, our tent set up inside for bugless nights, some semblance of order to our discordant belongings, the LED lights emplaced, and the cats exploring every nook and cranny. Chet comes bustling in, blithering non-stop about the Hurricane. A force five tempest is heading straight for us. His place on the waterfront will surely be leveled, he exclaims. He must move all his twenty years' work of precious papers in the next eight hours. Also boats, furniture, household everything, his empire must be secured. He is frantic. We must figure where to go also, he says. Fill the truck with gas. Lock everything down and flee.

Flee? What do you think we've been doing for the last month? Flee where? This is the last place. If this is our burial mound under a pile of ripped apart lumber and concrete, then so be it. We ain't budging. A piddling hurricane versus what we've just been through? Its maelstrom is but a walk in a spring shower . . . with flowers. No way we're fleeing, we're digging in and gritting our teeth. Come what hell or fury you have to throw at us . . . Belizean hurricane, there's no way we're moving back into that truck.

The hurricane passes with no wind, raining torrentially over the next few days without cessation. I am grateful for the roof, drubbing like a jungle drum, but this storm is a punk. It will take a lot more than this to kick our ass.

**Epilogue**

Now this exodus two months past, we agitate into this new life of raining flowers, idyllic temperatures, sea breezes, and millions of biting bugs. Adjustment sickness takes its turn with all of us—next Kim, who we haul to a primitive clinic for pills (all free), then the dog languishing for days with tick fever.

Another punk hurricane comes and goes. We hack, chop, and burn our acre of jungle, clearing enough space for gardens, getting to know the trees and insects before we destroy them. The colonial paradigm of a mansion centered in a groomed estate is strong in our blood, despite our New Age sentimentalities. The scorpion infested thatched hut in a tangle of vines is not to our tastes. A three-story tower of my mad design will soon rise from the jungle floor.

The hovercraft is repaired and repaired again, tropical attrition decaying every part enthusiastically. Skipping over the blue sea in the hovercraft is magic. The secret rivers traversed wind inland for fifty miles, cloaked in thick tangled growth. The local police are searching for me due to neighborhood dust infractions, a consequence of driving it down the street to the launch site.

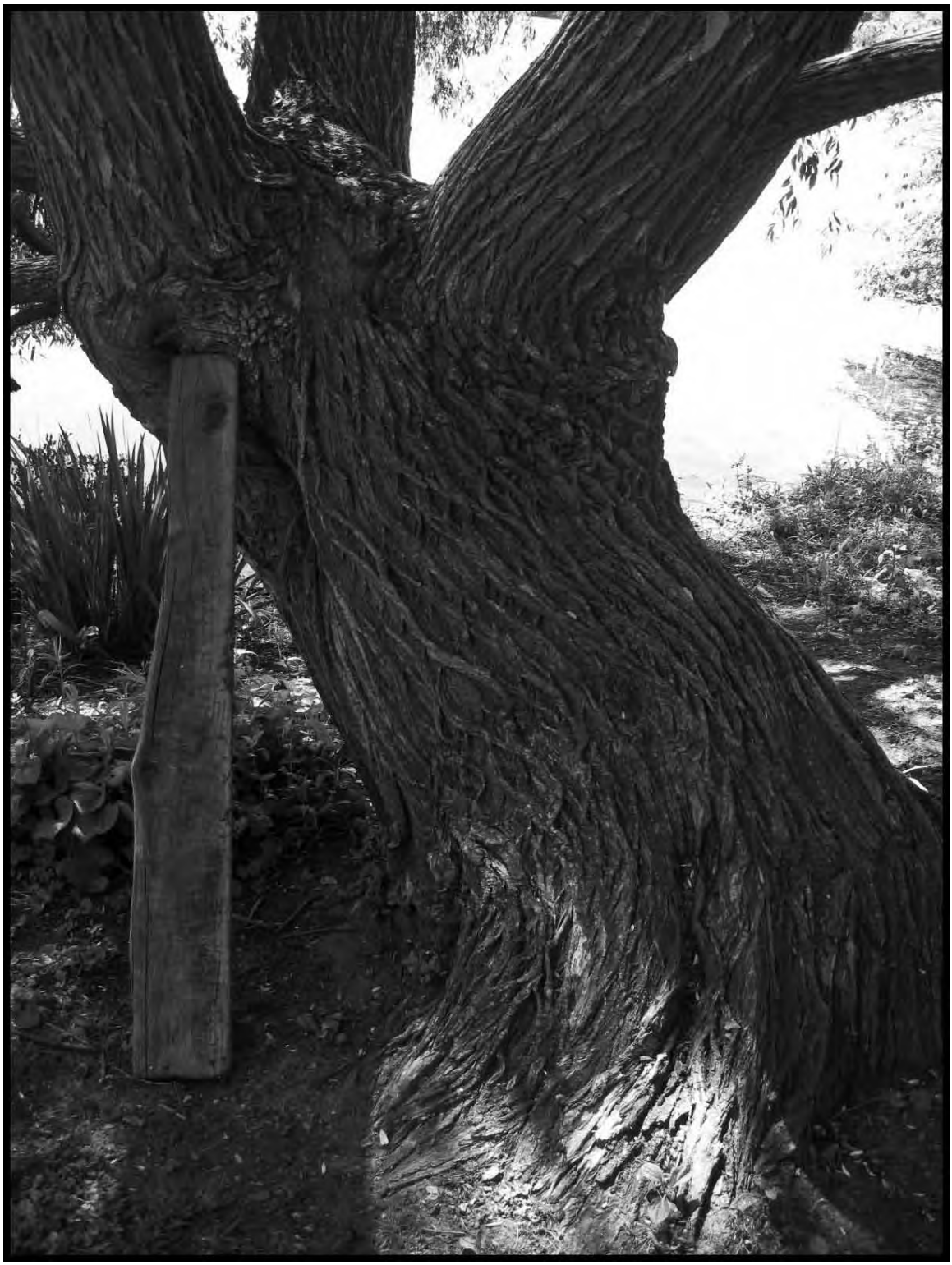
The people are still nice, some getting nicer, others showing their deep contempt of

First Worlders. Kim is pragmatic about her existence, so much of it about the kitchen and laundry and site work, that it seems that temple looting never enters her mind. But I am plagued with such questions—how to make a few dollars to offset our endless expenditures. When will the time be found to search for Karnataka Ku's golden statue? I build a shrimp trap, a charcoal-making machine, and have plans to make a plastic-melting machine. But to what end? I wonder. The connection with wind power moguls of the North fades, the hover business plans seem to crawl along in an insurmountable bureaucratic morass.

Where will be our place here in this society? What can we do to insure our sustainability, as well as give back and uplift the struggling around us? It is a race to create a life of meaning, of security, of importance before the money runs out. In the meantime, I join with twitching Chet, the local political provocateur, as his ghost-writer, for he writes like the insane prisoner scratching the wall with a spoon. With myself in the shadows, we instigate a Mayan uprising, refining rhetoric to readability. Maybe the god Ichmal will have pity on me and give me his ruby eye, or at least a gold earring the size of a truck tire.

* * * * * *

**Jeremy Kilar**



*Raymond Soulard, Jr.*

# Many Musics

**Eighth Series**

*When did it matter most?*
*When I smiled at another & believed.*

*i. New Work*

On high, where the mountains snowy knuckles
& the roads deep veins, the pressure lessens
& a hope elevates.

Chatter on the plane is what
some reck breathing for. If I disagree,
then nothing for it but to make
like those veins & new rush heart & mind.

******

*ii. And Again*

You were come new, & I had my gift
ready for you. But something, &
then something else. That smile,
something, something else. I chased,
again, a little, a little more. That smile,
something. It was only a dream,
that smile, you were come new, &
I had my gift for you. Something I kept.

******

*iii. Myths Breathe—*

These glaring beasts of night, still,
 the softest touch in my breathing,
the hustles with new sun. I'll start
 explaining myself by simple numbers
when any of you can nod & smile &
 finally account for the remain.

******

*iv. Spring Thaw*

Winter dawns in that strange youth,
 tossing newspapers at locked suburban
doors, talking myself through inner worlds
 finer than the day to come. A pretty girl,
a pen in hand, even the simple gesture
 of a smile & a handshake. Big, simple,
inner worlds I did not yet know how
 to conjure. I'd come home, fingers & limbs
numb, & the sharp yips of the thaw.
 Thaws hurt, then & now, & bigger
inner worlds still call to be made.

******

*v. Sobornost [After Herzog]*

In his cage, he remembers. The scent of unknown
flowers, chemicals really, the wind from
the window he'd quickly come through. Two
quick breaths, then his, the gentleness
he crushed, but then let go a little. Maybe
it was God's urge, he ignored the chemicals.

In her room she smokes. There is music
on the radio, too soft for lyrics, as she likes.
She sees stars through the ceiling, always
has since, even more now. She's learned
new ways to laugh too, less personal,
more forgiving for the many hands striking
empty air, & again, & again, & somehow yet
call this a life.

******

*vi. Render*

New work seems best to root from
the rest, the stars themselves tools
to remind of that banking melody,
day the old enemy for reasons too
familiar to sum, night the welcoming
thighs, the encouraging beat, smiling
hurried breath, & so on. And yet.
And yet. There is that older than
my paths & songs, roots dangling for
a hold. There are liners in those skies
tonight, tomorrow, beckoning for a ride,
maybe just for a song. There's sexy
glare in the gratings in the ground,
& three possibles for any smart denial.

New work is bedded through each new
hour, & a willing to still feel leaning
way over the edge, a willing, a hunger,
a slave to it maybe, to what
great notes can be found in that
next moment of balance between
possible fall, & wild ascent.

******

*vii. Just Play Through— [After Burke]*

If I can see also ligaments & light
 where I now see just tits & ass,
If I can feel the man's love of his
 personal savior as much as I love
  my pen & a tree to write near,
If I can embrace to hold my heart's
 urging truth that the vastness of any soul
  is on the far side of coin & office,
If I can act with humor, with doubt,
 with hope, keeping beat & breath,
If I can learn better to give it &
 take it, & accept the brutalest beauties
  of this world,
Perhaps I can live long & come to my end
 with an easy smile like to your own.

******

*viii. Temple of Dreams*

Found in a clearing shaped like a temple
 in full moonlight, potent without
flesh nor bones, a place, a portal,
 a tool, a salve, recked ancient by men
yet dreams do not bide by miles or hours.

I wonder over this as I marvel too
 that the Universe on luckier nights
seems most like sugar sprayed wildly
 across a darkling canvas. At my best,
I think there's space enough for metaphor,
 science, for every slight & unsure passage through.

******

*ix. That Slender Myth*

Tonight, again, I know nothing.
I am nobody. Singing to manifest,
crawling the dust. Recking the web.
Praying the hours hit the same vein
that preacher does tonight, spittle
& fists, sucking the moving sidewalk's

attention to his gesture & word,
the word, next word, he'll hustle
another to his unhappy explanation
by night's end, loose eyes from
that slight skirt, those misshapen green
leaves, irrelevant stars above,

yes. "Only suffering defines this human
dimension. Suffering & submission &
the relief of letting another direct
your path hereon." *I know nothing.*
*I am nobody.* I cannot say you
are wrong yet I will not sing your song.
What lights my days staggers me with
wild, uncertain music, & what caterwauls
my dreams sexes my mind even better
with the possibles here & hereon.

******

*x. From a Dream*

And again I'm in the classroom
And again that old bookstore job
And again this courtyard, this black pen,

Which are dreams, which to keep?

And the few meals remembered from years
And the click-clicking chess-clocks
And the faces that remain unknown

What else is passing by too?

And again it's springtime, mercy's cool air
And again I watch the homeless man prowl
And again, & still, I know nothing
but still add to the noise

I'd walk home tonight, from this courtyard,
with each & every one of you, if you
could breach my dreams at last, & land inside my skin.

******

*xi. Two Men*

There are only two men.
One sells the fire. One blazes.
Will you purchase your days with one
or learn how the other burns?

******

*xii. The Red Bag*

When the glaring lights have left
When the music has slowed to smoke
Where there is sniff of good blood & then no more
When touch brittles maybe to break
When best taste is old & cold, hurts

The red bag, doorway, back to dreams
The red bag, the path, come
The red bag, come, trust, come here.

* * * * * *

*Philip K. Dick*

# The King of the Elves

**[Classic Fiction]**

(*First published in* Beyond Fantastic Fiction*, September 1953*)

It was raining and getting dark. Sheets of water blew along the row of pumps at the edge of the filling station; the tree across the highway bent against the wind.

Shadrach Jones stood just inside the doorway of the little building, leaning against an oil drum. The door was open and gusts of rain blew in onto the wood floor. It was late; the sun had set, and the air was turning cold. Shadrach reached into his coat and brought out a cigar. He bit the end off it and lit it carefully, turning away from the door. In the gloom, the cigar burst into life, warm and glowing. Shadrach took a deep draw. He buttoned his coat around him and stepped out onto the pavement.

"Darn," he said. "What a night!" Rain buffeted him, wind blew at him. He looked up and down the highway, squinting. There were no cars in sight. He shook his head, locked up the gasoline pumps.

He went back into the building and pulled the door shut behind him. He opened the cash register and counted the money he'd taken in during the day. It was not much.

Not much, but enough for one old man. Enough to buy him tobacco and firewood and magazines, so that he could be comfortable as he waited for the occasional cars to come by. Not very many cars came along the highway any more. The highway had begun to fall into disrepair; there were many cracks in its dry, rough surface, and most cars preferred to take the big state highway that ran beyond the hills. There was nothing in Derryville to attract them, to make them turn toward it. Derryville was a small town, too small to bring in any of the major industries, too small to be very important to anyone. Sometimes hours went by without—

Shadrach tensed. His fingers closed over the money. From outside came a sound, the melodic ring of the signal wire stretched along the pavement.

Dinggg!

Shadrach dropped the money into the till and pushed the drawer closed. He stood up slowly and walked toward the door, listening. At the door, he snapped off the light and waited in the darkness, staring out.

He could see no car there. The rain was pouring down, swirling with the wind; clouds of mist moved along the road. And something was standing beside the pumps.

He opened the door and stepped out. At first, his eyes could make nothing out. Then the old man swallowed uneasily.

Two tiny figures stood in the rain, holding a kind of platform between them. Once, they might have been gaily dressed in bright garments, but now their clothes hung limp and sodden, dripping in the rain. They glanced half-heartedly at Shadrach. Water streaked their tiny faces, great drops of water. Their robes blew about them with the wind, lashing and swirling.

On the platform, something stirred. A small head turned wearily, peering at

Shadrach. In the dim light, a rain-streaked helmet glinted dully.

"Who are you?" Shadrach said.

The figure on the platform raised itself up. "I'm the King of the Elves and I'm wet."

Shadrach stared in astonishment.

"That's right," one of the bearers said. "We're all wet."

A small group of Elves came straggling up, gathering around their king. They huddled together forlornly, silently.

"The King of the Elves," Shadrach repeated. "Well, I'll be darned."

Could it be true? They were very small, all right, and their dripping clothes were strange and oddly colored.

But Elves?

"I'll be darned. Well, whatever you are, you shouldn't be out on a night like this."

"Of course not," the king murmured. "No fault of our own. No fault . . ." His voice trailed off into a choking cough. The Elf soldiers peered anxiously at the platform.

"Maybe you better bring him inside," Shadrach said. "My place is up the road. He shouldn't be out in the rain."

"Do you think we like being out on a night like this?" one of the bearers muttered. "Which way is it? Direct us."

Shadrach pointed up the road. "Over there. Just follow me. I'll get a fire going."

He went down the road, feeling his way onto the first of the flat stone steps that he and Phineas Judd had laid during the summer. At the top of the steps, he looked back. The platform was coming slowly along, swaying a little from side to side. Behind it, the Elf soldiers picked their way, a tiny column of silent dripping creatures, unhappy and cold.

"I'll get the fire started," Shadrach said. He hurried them into the house.

Wearily, the Elf King lay back against the pillow. After sipping hot chocolate, he had relaxed and his heavy breathing sounded suspiciously like a snore.

Shadrach shifted in discomfort.

"I'm sorry," the Elf King said suddenly, opening his eyes. He rubbed his forehead. "I must have drifted off. Where was I?"

"You should retire, Your Majesty," one of the soldiers said sleepily. "It is late and these are hard times."

"True," the Elf King said, nodding. "Very true." He looked up at the towering figure of Shadrach, standing before the fireplace, a glass of beer in his hand.
"Mortal, we thank you for your hospitality. Normally, we do not impose on human beings."

"It's those Trolls," another of the soldiers said, curled up on a cushion of the couch.

"Right," another soldier agreed. He sat up, groping for his sword. "Those reeking Trolls, digging and croaking—"

"You see," the Elf King went on, "as our party was crossing from the Great Low Steps toward the Castle, where it lies in the hollow of the Towering Mountains—"

"You mean Sugar Ridge," Shadrach supplied helpfully.

"The Towering Mountains. Slowly we made our way. A rainstorm came up. We became confused. All at once a group of Trolls appeared, crashing through the underbrush. We left the woods and sought safety on the Endless Path—"

"The highway. Route Twenty."

"So that is why we're here." The Elf King paused a moment. "Harder and harder it rained. The wind blew around us, cold and bitter. For an endless time we toiled along. We had no idea where we were going or what would become of us."

The Elf King looked up at Shadrach. "We knew only this: Behind us, the Trolls were coming, creeping through the woods, marching through the rain, crushing

everything before them."

He put his hand to his mouth and coughed, bending forward. All the Elves waited anxiously until he was done. He straightened up.

"It was kind of you to allow us to come inside. We will not trouble you for long. It is not the custom of the Elves—"

Again he coughed, covering his face with his hand. The Elves drew toward him apprehensively. At last the king stirred. He sighed.

"What's the matter?" Shadrach asked. He went over and took the cup of chocolate from the fragile hand. The Elf King lay back, his eyes shut.

"He has to rest," one of the soldiers said. "Where's your room? The sleeping room?"

"Upstairs," Shadrach said. "I'll show you where."

Late that night, Shadrach sat by himself in the dark, deserted living room, deep in meditation. The Elves were asleep above him, upstairs in the bedroom, the Elf King in the bed, the others curled up together on the rug.

The house was silent. Outside, the rain poured down endlessly, blowing against the house. Shadrach could hear the tree branches slapping in the wind. He clasped and unclasped his hands. What a strange business it was—all these Elves, with their old, sick king, their piping voices. How anxious and peevish they were!

But pathetic, too; so small and wet, with water dripping down from them, and all their gay robes limp and soggy.

The Trolls—what were they like? Unpleasant and not very clean. Something about digging, breaking and pushing through the woods . . .

Suddenly, Shadrach laughed in embarrassment. What was the matter with him, believing all this? He put his cigar out angrily, his ears red. What was going on? What kind of joke was this?

Elves? Shadrach grunted in indignation. Elves in Derryville? In the middle of Colorado? Maybe there were Elves in Europe. Maybe in Ireland. He had heard of that. But here? Upstairs in his own house, sleeping in his own bed?

"I've heard just about enough of this," he said. "I'm not an idiot, you know."

He turned toward the stairs, feeling for the banister in the gloom. He began to climb.

Above him, a light went on abruptly. A door opened.

Two Elves came slowly out onto the landing. They looked down at him. Shadrach halted halfway up the stairs. Something on their faces made him stop.

"What's the matter?" he asked hesitantly.

They did not answer. The house was turning cold, cold and dark, with the chill of the rain outside and the chill of the unknown inside.

"What is it?" he said again. "What's the matter?"

"The King is dead," one of the Elves said. "He died a few moments ago."

Shadrach stared up, wide-eyed. "He did? But—"

"He was very cold and very tired." The Elves turned away, going back into the room, slowly and quietly shutting the door.

Shadrach stood, his fingers on the banister, hard, lean fingers, strong and thin.

He nodded his head blankly.

"I see," he said to the closed door. "He's dead."

The Elf soldiers stood around him in a solemn circle. The living room was bright with sunlight, the cold white glare of early morning.

all you need
is love

"But wait," Shadrach said. He plucked at his necktie. "I have to get to the filling station. Can't you talk to me when I come home?"

The faces of the Elf soldiers were serious and concerned.

"Listen," one of them said. "Please hear us out. It is very important to us."

Shadrach looked past them. Through the window he saw the highway, steaming in the heat of day, and down a little way was the gas station, glittering brightly. And even as he watched, a car came up to it and honked thinly, impatiently. When nobody came out of the station, the car drove off again down the road.

"We beg you," a soldier said.

Shadrach looked down at the ring around him, the anxious faces, scored with concern and trouble. Strangely, he had always thought of Elves as carefree beings, flitting without worry or sense—

"Go ahead," he said. "I'm listening." He went over to the big chair and sat down. The Elves came up around him. They conversed among themselves for a moment, whispering, murmuring distantly. Then they turned toward Shadrach.

The old man waited, his arms folded.

"We cannot be without a king," one of the soldiers said. "We could not survive. Not these days."

"The Trolls," another added. "They multiply very fast. They are terrible beasts. They're heavy and ponderous, crude, bad-smelling—"

"The odor of them is awful. They come up from the dark wet places, under the earth, where the blind, groping plants feed in silence, far below the surface, far from the sun."

"Well, you ought to elect a king, then," Shadrach suggested. "I don't see any problem there."

"We do not elect the King of the Elves," a soldier said. "The old king must name his successor."

"Oh," Shadrach replied. "Well, there's nothing wrong with that method."

"As our old king lay dying, a few distant words came forth from his lips," a soldier said. "We bent closer, frightened and unhappy, listening."

"Important, all right," agreed Shadrach. "Not something you'd want to miss."

"He spoke the name of him who will lead us."

"Good. You caught it, then. Well, where's the difficulty?"

"The name he spoke was—was your name."

Shadrach stared. "Mine?"

"The dying king said: 'Make him, the towering mortal, your king. Many things will come if he leads the Elves into battle against the Trolls. I see the rising once again of the Elf Empire, as it was in the old days, as it was fore—'"

"Me!" Shadrach leaped up. "Me? King of the Elves?"

Shadrach walked about the room, his hands in his pockets. "Me, Shadrach Jones, King of the Elves." He grinned a little. "I sure never thought of it before."

He went to the mirror over the fireplace and studied himself. He saw his thin, graying hair, his bright eyes, dark skin, his big Adam's apple.

"King of the Elves," he said. "King of the Elves. Wait till Phineas Judd hears about this. Wait till I tell him!"

Phineas Judd would certainly be surprised!

Above the filling station, the sun shown, high in the clear blue sky.

Phineas Judd sat playing with the accelerator of his old Ford truck. The motor raced and slowed. Phineas reached over and

turned the ignition key off, then rolled the window all the way down.

"What did you say?" he asked. He took off his glasses and began to polish them, steel rims between slender, deft fingers that were patient from years of practice. He restored his glasses to his nose and smoothed what remained of his hair into place.

"What was it, Shadrach?" he said. "Let's hear that again."

"I'm King of the Elves," Shadrach repeated. He changed position, bringing his other foot up on the running board. "Who would have thought it? Me, Shadrach Jones, King of the Elves."

Phineas gazed at him. "How long have you been—King of the Elves, Shadrach?"

"Since the night before last."

"I see. The night before last." Phineas nodded. "I see. And what, may I ask, occurred the night before last?"

"The Elves came to my house. When the old king died, he told them that—"

A truck came rumbling up and the driver leaped out. "Water!" he said. "Where the hell is the hose?"

Shadrach turned reluctantly. "I'll get it." He turned back to Phineas. "Maybe I can talk to you tonight when you come back from town. I want to tell you the rest. It's very interesting."

"Sure," Phineas said, starting up his little truck. "Sure, Shadrach. I'm very interested to hear."

He drove off down the road.

Later in the day, Dan Green ran his flivver up to the filling station.

"Hey, Shadrach," he called. "Come over here! I want to ask you something."

Shadrach came out of the little house, holding a waste-rag in his hand.

"What is it?"

"Come here." Dan leaned out the window, a wide grin on his face, splitting his face from ear to ear. "Let me ask you something, will you?"

"Sure."

"Is it true? Are you really the King of the Elves?"

Shadrach flushed a little. "I guess I am," he admitted, looking away. "That's what I am, all right."

Dan's grin faded. "Hey, you trying to kid me? What's the gag?"

Shadrach became angry. "What do you mean? Sure, I'm the King of the Elves. And anyone who says I'm not—"

"All right, Shadrach," Dan said, starting up the flivver quickly. "Don't get mad. I was just wondering."

Shadrach looked very strange.

"All right," Dan said. "You don't hear me arguing, do you?"

By the end of the day, everyone around knew about Shadrach and how he had suddenly become the King of the Elves. Pop Richey, who ran the Lucky Store in Derryville, claimed Shadrach was doing it to drum up trade for the filling station.

"He's a smart old fellow," Pop said. "Not very many cars go along there any more. He knows what he's doing."

"I don't know," Dan Green disagreed. "You should hear him, I think he really believes it."

"King of the Elves?" They all began to laugh. "Wonder what he'll say next."

Phineas Judd pondered. "I've known Shadrach for years. I can't figure it out." He frowned, his face wrinkled and disapproving. "I don't like it."

Dan looked at him. "Then you think he believes it?"

"Sure," Phineas said. "Maybe I'm wrong, but I really think he does."

"But how could he believe it?" Pop asked. "Shadrach is no fool. He's been in business for a long time. He must be getting something out of it, the way I see it. But what,

if it isn't to build up the filling station?"

"Why, don't you know what he's getting?" Dan said, grinning. His gold tooth shone.

"What?" Pop demanded.

"He's got a whole kingdom to himself, that's what—to do with like he wants. How would you like that, Pop? Wouldn't you like to be King of the Elves and not have to run this old store any more?"

"There isn't anything wrong with my store," Pop said. "I ain't ashamed to run it. Better than being a clothing salesman."

Dan flushed. "Nothing wrong with that, either." He looked at Phineas. "Isn't that right? Nothing wrong with selling clothes, is there, Phineas?"

Phineas was staring down at the floor. He glanced up. "What? What was that?"

"What you thinking about?" Pop wanted to know. "You look worried."

"I'm worried about Shadrach," Phineas said. "He's getting old. Sitting out there by himself all the time, in the cold weather, with the rain water running over the floor—it blows something awful in the winter, along the highway—"

"Then you do think he believes it?" Dan persisted. "You don't think he's getting something out of it?"

Phineas shook his head absently and did not answer.

The laughter died down. They all looked at one another.

That night, as Shadrach was locking up the filling station, a small figure came toward him from the darkness.

"Hey!" Shadrach called out. "Who are you?"

An Elf soldier came into the light, blinking. He was dressed in a little gray robe, buckled at the waist with a band of silver. On his feet were little leather boots. He carried a short sword at his side.

"I have a serious message for you," the Elf said. "Now, where did I put it?"

He searched his robe while Shadrach waited. The Elf brought out a tiny scroll and unfastened it, breaking the wax expertly. He handed it to Shadrach.

"What's it say?" Shadrach asked. He bent over, his eyes close to the vellum. "I don't have my glasses with me. Can't quite make out these little letters."

"The Trolls are moving. They've heard that the old king is dead, and they're rising, in all the hills and valleys around. They will try to break the Elf Kingdom into fragments, scatter the Elves—"

"I see," Shadrach said. "Before your new king can really get started."

"That's right." The Elf soldier nodded. "This is a crucial moment for the Elves. For centuries, our existence has been precarious. There are so many Trolls, and Elves are very frail and often take sick—"

"Well, what should I do? Are there any suggestions?"

"You're supposed to meet with us under the Great Oak tonight. We'll take you into the Elf Kingdom, and you and your staff will plan and map the defense of the Kingdom."

"What?" Shadrach looked uncomfortable. "But I haven't eaten dinner. And my gas station—tomorrow is Saturday, and a lot of cars—"

"But you are King of the Elves," the soldier said.

Shadrach put his hand to his chin and rubbed it slowly.

"That's right," he replied. "I am, ain't I?"

The Elf soldier bowed.

"I wish I'd known this sort of thing was going to happen," Shadrach said. "I didn't suppose being King of the Elves—"

He broke off, hoping for an interruption. The Elf soldier watched him

calmly, without expression.

"Maybe you ought to have someone else as your king," Shadrach decided. "I don't know very much about war and things like that, fighting and all that sort of business." He paused, shrugged his shoulders. "It's nothing I've ever mixed in. They don't have wars here in Colorado. I mean they don't have wars between human beings."

Still the Elf soldier remained silent.

"Why was I picked?" Shadrach went on helplessly, twisting his hands. "1 don't know anything about it. What made him go and pick me? Why didn't he pick somebody else?"

"He trusted you," the Elf said. "You brought him inside your house, out of the rain. He knew that you expected nothing for it, that there was nothing you wanted. He had known few who gave and asked nothing back."

"Oh." Shadrach thought it over. At last he looked up. "But what about my gas station? And my house? And what will they say, Dan Green and Pop down at the store—"

The Elf soldier moved away, out of the light. "I have to go. It's getting late, and at night the Trolls come out. I don't want to be too far away from the others."

"Sure," Shadrach said.

"The Trolls are afraid of nothing, now that the old king is dead. They forage everywhere. No one is safe."

"Where did you say the meeting is to be? And what time?"

"At the Great Oak. When the moon sets tonight, just as it leaves the sky."

"I'll be there, I guess," Shadrach said. "I suppose you're right. The King of the Elves can't afford to let his kingdom down when it needs him most."

He looked around, but the Elf soldier was already gone.

Shadrach walked up the highway, his mind full of doubts and wonderings. When he came to the first of the flat stone steps, he stopped.

"And the old oak tree is on Phineas's farm! What'll Phineas say?"

But he was the Elf King and the Trolls were moving in the hills. Shadrach stood listening to the rustle of the wind as it moved through the trees beyond the highway, and along the far slopes and hills.

Trolls? Were there really Trolls there, rising up, bold and confident in the darkness of the night, afraid of nothing, afraid of no one?

And this business of being Elf King . . .

Shadrach went on up the steps, his lips pressed tight. When he reached the top of the stone steps, the last rays of sunlight had already faded. It was night.

Phineas Judd stared out the window. He swore and shook his head. Then he went quickly to the door and ran out onto the porch. In the cold moonlight a dim figure was walking slowly across the lower field, coming toward the house along the cow trail.

"Shadrach!" Phineas cried. "What's wrong? What are you doing out this time of night?"

Shadrach stopped and put his fists stubbornly on his hips.

"You go back home," Phineas said. "What's got into you?"

"I'm sorry, Phineas," Shadrach answered. "I'm sorry I have to go over your land. But I have to meet somebody at the old oak tree."

"At this time of night?"

Shadrach bowed his head.

"What's the matter with you, Shadrach? Who in the world you going to meet in the middle of the night on my farm?"

"I have to meet with the Elves. We're going to plan out the war with the Trolls."

"Well, I'll be damned," Phineas Judd

said. He went back inside the house and slammed the door. For a long time he stood thinking. Then he went back out on the porch again. "What did you say you were doing? You don't have to tell me, of course, but I just—"

"I have to meet the Elves at the old oak tree. We must have a general council of war against the Trolls."

"Yes, indeed. The Trolls. Have to watch for the Trolls all the time."

"Trolls are everywhere," Shadrach stated, nodding his head. "I never realized it before. You can't forget them or ignore them. They never forget you. They're always planning, watching you—"

Phineas gaped at him, speechless.

"Oh, by the way," Shadrach said. "I may be gone for some time. It depends on how long this business is going to take. I haven't had much experience in fighting Trolls, so I'm not sure. But I wonder if you'd mind looking after the gas station for me, about twice a day, maybe once in the morning and once at night, to make sure no one's broken in or anything like that."

"You're going away?" Phineas came quickly down the stairs. "What's all this about Trolls? Why are you going?"

Shadrach patiently repeated what he had said.

"But what for?"

"Because I'm the Elf King. I have to lead them."

There was silence. "I see," Phineas said, at last. "That's right, you did mention it before, didn't you? But, Shadrach, why don't you come inside for a while and you can tell me about the Trolls and drink some coffee and—"

"Coffee?" Shadrach looked up at the pale moon above him, the moon and the bleak sky. The world was still and dead and the night was very cold and the moon would not be setting for some time.

Shadrach shivered.

"It's a cold night," Phineas urged. "Too cold to be out. Come on in—"

"I guess I have a little time," Shadrach admitted. "A cup of coffee wouldn't do any harm. But I can't stay very long . . ."

Shadrach stretched his legs out and sighed. "This coffee sure tastes good, Phineas."

Phineas sipped a little and put his cup down. The living room was quiet and warm. It was a very neat little living room with solemn pictures on the walls, gray uninteresting pictures that minded their own business. In the corner was a small reed organ with sheet music carefully arranged on top of it.

Shadrach noticed the organ and smiled. "You still play, Phineas?"

"Not much any more. The bellows don't work right. One of them won't come back up."

"I suppose I could fix it sometime. If I'm around, I mean."

"That would be fine," Phineas said. "I was thinking of asking you."

"Remember how you used to play 'Vilia' and Dan Green came up with that lady who worked for Pop during the summer? The one who wanted to open a pottery shop?"

"I sure do," Phineas said.

Presently, Shadrach set down his coffee cup and shifted in his chair.

"You want more coffee?" Phineas asked quickly. He stood up. "A little more?"

"Maybe a little. But I have to be going pretty soon."

"It's a bad night to be outside."

Shadrach looked through the window. It was darker; the moon had almost gone down. The fields were stark. Shadrach shivered. "I wouldn't disagree with you," he said.

Phineas turned eagerly. "Look, Shadrach. You go on home where it's warm. You can come out and fight Trolls some other

night. There'll always be Trolls. You said so yourself. Plenty of time to do that later, when the weather's better. When it's not so cold."

Shadrach rubbed his forehead wearily. "You know, it all seems like some sort of a crazy dream. When did I start talking about Elves and Trolls? When did it all begin?" His voice trailed off. "Thank you for the coffee." He got slowly to his feet. "It warmed me up a lot. And I appreciated the talk. Like old times, you and me sitting here the way we used to."

"Are you going?" Phineas hesitated. "Home?"

"I think I better. It's late."

Phineas got quickly to his feet. He led Shadrach to the door, one arm around his shoulder.

"All right, Shadrach, you go on home. Take a good hot bath before you go to bed. It'll fix you up. And maybe just a little snort of brandy to warm the blood."

Phineas opened the front door and they went slowly down the porch steps, onto the cold, dark ground.

"Yes, I guess I'll be going," Shadrach said. "Good night—"

"You go on home." Phineas patted him on the arm. "You run along now and take a good hot bath. And then go straight to bed."

"That's a good idea. Thank you, Phineas. I appreciate your kindness." Shadrach looked down at Phineas's hand on his arm. He had not been that close to Phineas for years.

Shadrach contemplated the hand. He wrinkled his brow, puzzled.

Phineas's hand was huge and rough and his arms were short. His fingers were blunt; his nails broken and cracked. Almost black, or so it seemed in the moonlight.

Shadrach looked up at Phineas. "Strange," he murmured.

"What's strange, Shadrach?"

In the moonlight, Phineas's face seemed oddly heavy and brutal. Shadrach had never noticed before how the jaw bulged, what a great protruding jaw it was. The skin was yellow and coarse, like parchment. Behind glasses, the eyes were like two stones, cold and lifeless. The ears were immense, the hair stringy and matted.

Odd that he never noticed before. But he had never seen Phineas in the moonlight.

Shadrach stepped away, studying his old friend. From a few feet off Phineas Judd seemed unusually short and squat. His legs were slightly bowed. His feet were enormous. And there was something else—

"What is it?" Phineas demanded, beginning to grow suspicious. "Is there something wrong?"

Something was completely wrong. And he had never noticed it, not in all the years they had been friends. All around Phineas Judd was an odor, a faint, pungent stench of rot, of decaying flesh, damp and moldy.

Shadrach glanced slowly about him. "Something wrong?" he echoed. "No, I wouldn't say that."

By the side of the house was an old rain barrel, half fallen apart. Shadrach walked over to it.

"No, Phineas. I wouldn't say there's something wrong."

"What are you doing?"

"Me?" Shadrach took hold of one of the barrel staves and pulled it loose. He walked back to Phineas, carrying the barrel stave carefully. "I'm King of the Elves. Who—or what—are you?"

Phineas roared and attacked with his great murderous shovel hands.

Shadrach smashed him over the head with the barrel stave. Phineas bellowed with rage and pain.

At the shattering sound, there was a clatter and from underneath the house came a furious horde of bounding, leaping creatures, dark bent-over things, their bodies heavy and squat, their feet and heads immense. Shadrach

took one look at the flood of dark creatures pouring out from Phineas's basement. He knew what they were.

"Help!" Shadrach shouted. "Trolls! Help!"

The trolls were all around him, grabbing hold of him, tugging at him, climbing up him, pummeling his face and body.

Shadrach fell to with the barrel stave, swung again and again, kicking Trolls with his feet, whacking them with the barrel stave. There seemed to be hundreds of them. More and more poured out from under Phineas's house, a surging black tide of pot-shaped creatures, their great eyes and teeth gleaming in the moonlight.

"Help!" Shadrach cried again, more feebly now. He was getting winded. His heart labored painfully. A Troll bit his wrist, clinging to his arm. Shadrach flung it away, pulling loose from the horde clutching his trouser legs, the barrel stave rising and falling.

One of the Trolls caught hold of the stave. A whole group of them helped, wrenching furiously, trying to pull it away. Shadrach hung on desperately. Trolls were all over him, on his shoulders, clinging to his coat, riding his arms, his legs, pulling his hair—

He heard a high-pitched clarion call from a long way off, the sound of some distant golden trumpet, echoing in the hills.

The Trolls suddenly stopped attacking. One of them dropped off Shadrach's neck. Another let go of his arm.

The call came again, this time more loudly.

"Elves!" a Troll rasped. He turned and moved toward the sound, grinding his teeth and spitting with fury.

"Elves!"

The Trolls swarmed forward, a growing wave of gnashing teeth and nails, pushing furiously toward the Elf columns. The Elves broke formation and joined battle, shouting with wild joy in their shrill, piping voices. The tide of Trolls rushed against them, Troll against Elf, shovel nails against golden sword, biting jaw against dagger.

"Kill the Elves!"

"Death to the Trolls!"

"Onward!"

"Forward!"

Shadrach fought desperately with the Trolls that were still clinging to him. He was exhausted, panting and gasping for breath. Blindly, he whacked on and on, kicking and jumping, throwing Trolls away from him, through the air and across the ground.

How long the battle raged, Shadrach never knew. He was lost in a sea of dark bodies, round and evil-smelling, clinging to him, tearing, biting, fastened to his nose and hair and fingers. He fought silently, grimly.

All around him, the Elf legions clashed with the Troll horde, little groups of struggling warriors on all sides.

Suddenly Shadrach stopped fighting. He raised his head, looking uncertainly around him. Nothing moved. Everything was silent. The fighting had ceased.

A few Trolls still clung to his arms and legs. Shadrach whacked one with the barrel stave. It howled and dropped to the ground. He staggered back, struggling with the last Troll, who hung tenaciously to his arm.

"Now you!" Shadrach gasped. He pried the Troll loose and flung it into the air. The Troll fell to the ground and scuttled off into the night.

There was nothing more. No Troll moved anywhere. All was silent across the bleak moon-swept fields.

Shadrach sank down on a stone. His chest rose and fell painfully. Red specks swam before his eyes. Weakly, he got out his pocket handkerchief and wiped his neck and face.

He closed his eyes, shaking his head from side to side.

When he opened his eyes again, the Elves were coming toward him, gathering their legion together again. The Elves were disheveled and bruised. Their golden armor was gashed and torn. Their helmets were bent or missing. Most of their scarlet plumes were gone. Those that still remained were drooping and broken.

But the battle was over. The war was won. The Troll hordes had been put to flight.

Shadrach got slowly to his feet. The Elf warriors stood around him in a circle, gazing up at him with silent respect. One of them helped steady him as he put his handkerchief away in his pocket.

"Thank you," Shadrach murmured. "Thank you very much."

"The Trolls have been defeated," an Elf stated, still awed by what had happened.

Shadrach gazed around at the Elves. There were many of them, more than he had ever seen before. All the Elves had turned out for the battle. They were grim-faced, stern with the seriousness of the moment, weary from the terrible struggle.

"Yes, they're gone, all right," Shadrach said. He was beginning to get his breath. "That was a close call. I'm glad you fellows came when you did. I was just about finished, fighting them all by myself."

"All alone, the King of the Elves held off the entire Troll army," an Elf announced shrilly.

"Eh?" Shadrach said, taken aback. Then he smiled. "That's true, I did fight them alone for a while. I did hold off the Trolls all by myself. The whole darn Troll army."

"There is more," an Elf said.

Shadrach blinked. "More?"

"Look over here, O King, mightiest of all the Elves. This way. To the right."

The Elves led Shadrach over.

"What is it?" Shadrach murmured, seeing nothing at first. He gazed down, trying to pierce the darkness. "Could we have a torch over here?"

Some Elves brought little pine torches.

There, on the frozen ground, lay Phineas Judd, on his back. His eyes were blank and staring, his mouth half open. He did not move. His body was cold and stiff.

"He is dead," an Elf said solemnly.

Shadrach gulped in sudden alarm. Cold sweat stood out abruptly on his forehead. "My gosh! My old friend! What have I done?"

"You have slain the Great Troll."

Shadrach paused.

"I what?"

"You have slain the Great Troll, leader of all the Trolls."

"This has never happened before," another Elf exclaimed excitedly. "The Great Troll has lived for centuries. Nobody imagined he could die. This is our most historic moment."

All the Elves gazed down at the silent form with awe, awe mixed with more than a little fear.

"Oh, go on!" Shadrach said. "That's just Phineas Judd."

But as he spoke, a chill moved up his spine. He remembered what he had seen a little while before, as he stood close by Phineas, as the dying moonlight crossed his old friend's face.

"Look." One of the Elves bent over and unfastened Phineas's blue-serge vest. He pushed the coat and vest aside. "See?"

Shadrach bent down to look.

He gasped.

Underneath Phineas Judd's blue-serge vest was a suit of mail, an encrusted mesh of ancient, rusting iron, fastened tightly around the squat body. On the mail stood an engraved insignia, dark and time-worn, embedded with dirt and rust. A moldering half-obliterated emblem. The emblem of a crossed owl leg and toadstool.

The emblem of the Great Troll.

"Golly," Shadrach said. "And I killed him."

For a long time he gazed silently down. Then, slowly, realization began to grow in him. He straightened up, a smile forming on his face.

"What is it, O King?" an Elf piped.

"I just thought of something," Shadrach said. "I just realized that—that since the Great Troll is dead and the Troll army has been put to flight—"

He broke off. All the Elves were waiting.

"I thought maybe I—that is, maybe if you don't need me any more—"

The Elves listened respectfully. "What is it, Mighty King? Go on."

"I thought maybe now I could go back to the filling station and not be king any more." Shadrach glanced hopefully around at them. "Do you think so? With the war over and all. With him dead. What do you say?"

For a time, the Elves were silent. They gazed unhappily down at the ground. None of them said anything. At last they began moving away, collecting their banners and pennants.

"Yes, you may go back," an Elf said quietly. "The war is over. The Trolls have been defeated. You may return to your filling station, if that is what you want."

A flood of relief swept over Shadrach. He straightened up, grinning from ear to ear. "Thanks! That's fine. That's really fine. That's the best news I've heard in my life."

He moved away from the Elves, rubbing his hands together and blowing on them.

"Thanks an awful lot." He grinned around at the silent Elves. "Well, I guess I'll be running along, then. It's late. Late and cold. It's been a hard night. I'll—I'll see you around."

The Elves nodded silently.

"Fine. Well, good night." Shadrach turned and started along the path. He stopped for a moment, waving back at the Elves. "It was quite a battle, wasn't it? We really licked them." He hurried on along the path. Once again he stopped, looking back and waving. "Sure glad I could help out. Well, good night!"

One or two on the Elves waved, but none of them said anything.

Shadrach Jones walked slowly toward his place. He could see it from the rise, the highway that few cars traveled, the filling station falling to ruin, the house that might not last as long as himself, and not enough money coming in to repair them or buy a better location.

He turned around and went back.

The Elves were still gathered there in the silence of the night. They had not moved away.

"I was hoping you hadn't gone," Shadrach said, relieved.

"And we were hoping you would not leave," said a soldier.

Shadrach kicked a stone. It bounced through the tight silence and stopped. The Elves were still watching him.

"Leave?" Shadrach asked. "And me King of the Elves?"

"Then you will remain our king?" an Elf cried.

"It's a hard thing for a man of my age to change. To stop selling gasoline and suddenly be a king. It scared me for a while. But it doesn't any more."

"You will? You will?"

"Sure," said Shadrach Jones.

The little circle of Elf torches closed in joyously. In their light, he saw a platform like the one that had carried the old King of the Elves. But this one was much larger, big enough to hold a man, and dozens of the soldiers waited with proud shoulders under the shafts.

A soldier gave him a happy bow. “For you, Sire.”

Shadrach climbed aboard. It was less comfortable than walking, but he knew this was how they wanted to take him to the Kingdom of the Elves.

* * * * * *

EUNICE AND JULIAN COHEN GALLERIA

**Gertrude Stein Home Movie, Circa 1927**

Alice B has long relinquished Ms. Stein
to her madness. Gertie turns a blank face
to the camera. Her eyes pull the rest of
her bulky body along a pretty path
where there are well-to-do guests and they glance
at the camera and wonder who she is
that friends are taking these movies of her.
She walks slowly, holds tough to herself as
do her poems: words like spite like barbed wire like
flattened peony petals. Alice B
does not smile, does not look pleasant. Perhaps
she has given Gertie the results of
recent X-rays so Gertie knows why she hurts.
It's Alice B's responsibility.
Some youngster, some man on either side of
the lumbering poet… The day is ripe
for well-to-do guests. It's clear, in this place,
only Gertrude truly knows where she is.

* * *

**About Colin Schroeder**

What the hell really happened to my sweet old
poet friend, Colin Schroeder, whose starving eyes
would not release me throughout my entire
visit to Chicago, 1969?
Did he really choke to death on a fishbone?
I don't think so. More likely he was blown up
by a shotgun pointed at him courtesy of
an angry husband in Chi town where Colin
chose to live. "All the angels are there," he said.
"They fled New York, came to Chicago to
write poems and drink Ripple wine."

I stayed where I was in the Inland Empire.
Nothing happens there except spousal abuse
and strong, hot winds. Safe enough. It seems to me
that Colin chose a bad place to die whether
you believe the official version of his
passing or mine. When I traveled to stand by
his gravesite with other more appropriate
friends, I thought of us—Colin Shroeder and me—
gripping each other like Velcro tape at the
bus station, him saying "Come with," me saying,
"I can't."

* * *

**A Dream of Thunder**

Something rumbles, maybe thunder, maybe the
voice of Poseidon…

maybe I dreamed this

Maybe my dreams have escaped and are free to
find me wherever I am

I think they can do that

At night, my eyes are like clenched teeth,
trying to keep the dreams away because they're

dreadful and strange. Later, when the smallest
thorn of light pokes through the dark outside,

I sleep at ease,

not dreaming, not feeling or knowing
anything. In the background, just above the

mountain, a raggedy marching band turns then
returns like a dream of thunder or of rain

* * *

**After the Hurricane**

There is that moment, an hour or two
after the hurricane, when it comes
to you that, before it hit, you were
weeping. You sat in the kitchen and
thought about aging, how your children
hated the oldness of you, refused
to see you. You were weeping. Your feet
were crossed at the ankles, a tissue
was balled-up and damp in your fist. You
wept for your sins, for the selfishness
of your soul, for the sound the minutes
make as they race by you, pass you up.
When the hurricane hit, the screen door
blew off and the roof shingles lifted
and the rain came like needles. Your cat
leapt to the top of the fridge, your lover
pulled you into the bathroom and held
you very tightly. The lights went out,
the phone rang twice then stopped, a porch chair
blew over on its side, danced across
the yard. After a while, it was over.
You thanked God for the cat, for the roof,
for the way it stopped suddenly, then
all you heard was rain landing hard on
the sill. You went to bed and woke late
at night with a cramp in your hand. You
still held the tissue, balled-up and damp
in your fist. *Oh yes*, you told your
self, *right before the hurricane, I
was weeping.*

* * *

**Where It Goes**

*for C.Bukowski*

Where does it go, all that living?
It was real when you lived it.
Then, it felt like parakeet pecks on your lips.
Then, tiny spots you could see when you
wiped your mouth on a white napkin.

The specks were proof of life.
The feathers in the cage were proof of nothing.
You ask everyone, *where did it go*?
They like to think you're drunk again
so they can smile at the horror of your question.

It's horrible to be human, huh, kiddo?
Horrible to know what you've done wrong
and to know that you can't fix it.
Mad dogs don't know these things, humans do.
Where does it go, all that living?

You close your eyes for a nap, open them,
and your passion has wilted like a
picked wildflower.
Tragic—oh tragic. So, what now?
Your rhythms are poverty-stricken—

last grains of rice on a paper plate.
You've got death in your sneakers
and your ears ring with the sounds
of no one saying anything anymore.

That's just the way it is.
The best you're going to do
after dark tonight is decide
whether or not to feel—
whether or not to bleed.

* * * * * *

*Raymond Soulard, Jr.*

# Notes from New England

**[Commentary]**

*"Please accept this ragged purse*
*of high notes."*

*The following continues the series originally called* Notes from New England*, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as* Notes from the Northwest, *& appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.*

*6/7/2012*
*Coney Island Hot Dogs*
*Worcester, Massachusetts*

OK, this is funny. Saw Phish first back here in Nov. 98 in Worcester—twist that with the many times in the '90s I traveled Boston<->Hartford, sometimes passing through Worcester, & this joint next door to the old bus station, the big dripping hot dog held in a hand painted on the back wall of the building—& come here a few times—not many—once skipping work on Harvard Bookstore—that's '93-'94 time period—18 years ago—

Now here, & seeing Phish twice, tonight & tomorrow night, first time since summer 2010—2nd & 3rd since I guess 2000—21st & 22nd time overall—ha & listening right now to The Church's *Priest = Aura* album from '92—

* * * * * *

[*Note: These notes were written in a little black notebook I sometimes travel with. They contain ideas I've been playing with for awhile, as well as new ideas, some to be found in this issue, & in those upcoming.*]

*6/7/2012*
*In line for Phish show outside DCU Center*
*Worcester, Massachusetts*

What is the Red Bag? It's the doorway to Dreamland *without* sleep—I'm not sure what that means, where one physically is when entering into it—

For Bags End this means easier transit with Creature Common—

*[moved into venue to my seat]*

The Red Bag is co-located in several places—

1. Clover-dale[1]
2. Creature Common[2]
3. Bags End[3]

It could be more places, like back of Nat Perfect's[4] store—Noah Hotel—inside **RemoteLand**—it is the connector—the portal from one place to another—

This raises the question of what's in the Red Bag—& how to enter it? Does one close one's eyes but not sleep?

*Close eyes &*
*picture arriving*
*& so one arrives—*

Where did it come from—who controls it? That is unknown—why does it exist? It was necessary—

Is there one on the ships overhead? Did it come from there?

The point is that it is *multiply co-located*

LSD is a non-specific amplifier—now what if the Red Bag is too?

What would that mean?

What would it amplify?

I'm not sure on this—

---

[1] Clover-dale is an apparently deserted farm near Stowe, Vermont, the subject of a photographic spread in *Cenacle* | 79 | October 2011. It also appears in fixtional form in *Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]* in the current issue of *The Cenacle.*

[2] The Creature Common is a place in Imaginal Space, sometimes described in *Labyrinthine*. Some Creatures have appeared in photographic form in *The Cenacle.* There will be more writing about The Creature Common in upcoming issues of *The Cenacle* [there are some brief mentions of Creatures & the Creatures Common in the current issue's *Labyrinthine* & *Notes from New England*].

[3] Bags End is both a predecessor to, & a contemporary kin of, The Creature Common. A writing about Bags End was published in *Cenacle* | 41 | April 2000.

[4] A number of Nat Perfect short stories were published in early issues of *The Cenacle.*

I like co-location & the way to enter but is there an inside to the Red Bag? Or is it like a window from one place to another—

Red Bag timeline current/pending:

June 2012
- Red Bag in *Labyrinthine*, Part Seven
- "Red Bag" in *Many Musics, Eighth Series*, #12
- *Cenacle* 81—"Red Bag" poem
- On "Within's Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution," 6/16/2012, when *Many Musics, Eighth Series*, #12 is read
- Jellicle Literary Guild 6/30/2012 meeting

July 2012
- *ElectroLounge* when *Cenacle* 81 is uploaded
- *Bags End News* next issue

August 2012
- *TransArtsBook* volume?

March 2013
- *Scriptor Press Sampler* 14

Unknown
- Nat Perfect story—one of New England ghosts, time travel, Red Bag, a blow to the head? & what of these ghosts—& some kind of related book or maybe periodical—or introduce many kinds of *BEN* and *Lx* elements into story, *MM* too—

Nat Perfect's story becomes a sort of entry way to Dreamland / Imaginal Space, etc.—Nat Perfect a gate-keeper—his story is one on the border between the daylight & the other—I need to re-read his stories, scan & collect them from early *Cenacle*s—figure what to keep—

He has an experience that changes things, not him per se, but his place in the world, what he sees the world to be—the key, like with Chrisakah story in *Bags End News*, is to keep something authentic in his voice, a deep continuity that validates the new stories—

I think he can walk but chooses not to—I think the mystery around his crippled state is resolved & thus pushes forward the new stories—

His newsstand carries the usual & the not-usual—I need to parse out what oddness has already been in his stories—tease into being the transition to stories I'd want to write about him now—

That would be one terrific challenge—find his place in things—it's been ten years since I wrote him & I was burning out on it then—I can tell a better story now—

The Red Bag is only a piece of it, however—meant to help create *synchrony*, in all the pieces—but it's not an answer—it supplants nothing—what it does do is *protect*—& does so with no apparent source of its power—it was necessary—Bags End needed a fourth bag—the Red Bag

needed a function—is that all to it? I doubt so—

How is it introduced in *Bags End News*? Two things—its co-location is discovered & the story involves Jill Boot as a part of re-introducing Bags End Friends into story—

The question occurs to me: if Bags End now read regularly on my radio show, when back, & ongoing this time, in *Cenacle*? And how? illustrated? hand-written? Handwritten last time in *Sixes & Sevens* & illustrated too—the time is coming for that to happen—all borders down, all projects live distinctly but cross over, in many kinds of ways—that's how I'm aiming all this—the Red Bag is a symbol of this goal of *synchrony*—

Where does *Labyrinthine* go next? I think it stays in Clover-dale, but goes deeper—I've got to read the 1500 pgs so far & pull out themes & threads & characters—connect & connect & connect—& why? In my childhood things connected or I tried to do it—like kids in my neighborhood & at school—why?—that as a young person I was driven to do that—what drove me in this? Take back your mind—teach others how—how deep in me does this go? & why? It's before my bad adolescent years—it's from childhood—*strength in numbers*—in getting everyone into the boat & all boats rising—

but how do I work that into my daylight hours—I've tried toward that for years & nothing—

& I can see the evil politics of this day & I can't believe kindness will overturn it—

So what to do? I'm helping Occupy Boston Radio to succeed—this is my overt political contribution—as for work I'd like to think differently but I feel sort of helpless—all Boston & Cambridge there & yet I'm stuck counting down to unemployment again end of June—

I don't know—I'd like different but I don't know how—

It doesn't need to be an organized story, *Labyrinthine* that is—*Bags End News* & Nat Perfect can be more so—I like *Labyrinthine* being a heightless thing, depthless, ocean, woods, ever more, ever more—

It all becomes the greatest game of hiding things here & there, clues, false clues, double-true clues—

Nuff for now, time for Phish! ☺

* * * * * *

6/9/2012
Arlington, Massachusetts
Dream Journal entry

Set in space, a group of people come together, seemingly randomly, & for a moment are set to make war on their slavers, one is a Capn Mal from Firefly-like leader, there are others, they are all captured but for one who was late in joining them, he follows their prison ship by foot, it is a very slow-moving airplane, they think they capture it & are flying it, but they are not, the attack they make on the slaver complex is completely illusory---but this group of people are the ones who sent the Red Bags down---unsure their (its?) origin---

* * * * * *

6/17/2012
Traveling by bus & then MBTA
from Arlington to Boston, Massachusetts

Someone says, "Three things will get you by in the world: a heavy wallet, a tight ass, or a smart mouth. The last is the refuge for most of us who don't have the first two."

Continues: "Now here's what it is & your choice in it: treat every moment & movement as important--it could be--who's to say? But maybe then life becomes a dance, shifting patterns of steps, & you're paying more attention than you ever have--you're looking to make the right moves--& having to call what's right--you're connecting one hour to a thought to a glance to a melody sticky in your mind's horn--you're on it, you're sharper--now life is still going to gut your plans from time to time--take your legs out, just because--or no because--or who knows what--but you're not a blur shambling through your own days--you lose a few pounds of fat in your thinking--near the sharpness of your gut--even more, you feel a little more what others do--their steps stagger too sometimes--they smile & don't know--they're watching you, deep sniffing if you know better or just something they don't--& sometimes all this works & sometimes it's shit but maybe not as often--"

* * * * * *

## *Judih Haggai*

bud whispers
this early morning
secrets in code

* * *

mental relapse
was i asleep or awake?
and now, what is this?

* * *

another morning
hummingbird finds nectar
and so will i

* * *

in the soundscape
workboots, coughs and farts
neighbourhood wake-up

* * *

soft whisperings
neighbour to dog
morning caress

* * *

lizard still
on stucco wall
aroused by nothing

* * *

raindrop curtains
part to reveal
a new path

* * *

bush of purple blooms
a face of empathy
in my garden

* * *

up like a shock
before life begins
secrets of my own

* * *

a glimpse of light
through the mist
long lost friend

* * *

blend sticks and straw
weave into silk
call it a day

* * *

mysteries
continue to educate
watch, listen, learn

* * * * * *

*Raymond Soulard, Jr.*

# Labyrinthine

**[a new fixtion]**

## Part Seven

*"There is no final answer."*
—Dr. Timothy Leary,
Radio Interview, 1986.

The spider had rested inside the tub in the dim bathroom all day. A man came in a few times, moved around, left. The spider stayed in one spot awhile, halfway down the tub's inside wall, then moved. It was perhaps peaceful. It was perhaps warm enough.

Some hours later, the man came in & turned on the light. The spider, as spiders do, waited. Suddenly there was water everywhere. Like a rainstorm but heated. The spider panicked, perhaps a little, & made to scutter away, but was caught up in something, & there was a gentle hand, large but not intending harmful, & movement, hurried, perhaps a door opened, there were words, again no harmful intent & then shake, shake, shake, & the spider was in another dim place, colder, & left to choose this way or that—

But the bubbles knew. Such fine soap bubbles, yes. They had filled their task, to come to be when soapy liquid hit water, & float by the millions in a brightly lit bathtub, & when the bath was over, to seek the drain, all of them, for that was where they were bound after their performance & had you asked a soap bubble why you would have gotten similar answer perhaps if someone had asked you "why two arms & not three? Why no tail, bill, or trunk?"—

The man started, then, looked at his pen—yes, indeed, this looked quite possibly like the way on——— or———

## Part Seven

*"We are creatures of the dream."*
—Terence McKenna,
in workshop, 1982.

In a place where the bugs kept getting bigger, finally one was human shaped, & the matter was a choice: as always: to understand or to escape.

And the facility nearby where time-travelling was conducted in a large room secreted behind a small storefront that sold newspapers & cigarettes to sleepers worse than us. Consoles for each traveler set about an armchair. We each put on our headphones & she again warned me about the pencils going

soft in transit. I saw no harm; she saw her doubts made more manifest. At one point, there was a not-quite dog, powerful, we were uncertain its intent as it passed. Worse later, someone was going to kill someone to bring someone back to life.

When it settled, not just the fractures of arrival where departure occurred almost immediately, I was at a sit-in in a basement, with a lot of others, I was dirty, & not sure how protesting from this basement helped, or who protested against. As always, my job was to help, to make a small set of decisions that would change the course of this situation. Those I worked for had the power to have created the machinery I used, & the conviction that *not* interfering in the course of history was what led to the final sequence of slow but unstoppable disasters. Since I was not physically present I was immune to physical harm. More importantly, I was not controlled on every side by the greatest human shackle: fear.

Bowie doesn't dream anymore, since he's been some or all mushroom, they don't understand dreams or, like many things, don't wish to, or at least admit it, & so he doesn't dream but then he does tonight, not even fully cohered—*seriously, where the fuck am I?*—but whatever he is, was, comes together & he dreams, he's in a record store, & the old feelings of love for such places is real, walking in like it's better than the subtlest temple, the vastest toy store, he arrives not to a store at all, in his heart, but—

Sees the girl. Her hair is a frosted blonde, the kind he hasn't seen in a long time, & she has a nice figure, from what he can suss through her thick rumpled sweater, & a young smile, she looks lost, in a place where he always feels found—

"I started in one place & now—"
"That happens here, if you let it—"
"I didn't think I did—"
"But here you are—elsewhere—"
"I suppose—"

Bowie considers. A bed & candlelight. A blink away. Away the rumpled sweater, & maybe that hair coloring too.

But why here, this girl, this dreaming? Are the mushrooms letting him have this, or is he having it despite them? They're not enemies, he reminds himself. He just tires of their critiques. They don't get that constant content is not a human thing. Peace isn't always preferable.

"Come on," he says softly, taking her hand, realizing he looks much younger, less fleshed out, not a boy who would say or do such a thing, but she reacts immediately to his order. They walk deeper into the record store.

He looks at her, twice, & thinks, OK, I'll ride this one for awhile. This construct. Maybe the girl too. He wonders how young he actually looks. He talks, this is where his shaping skills learned from the mushrooms, come into play.

"How was class?"
She's distracted by the rows & rows of LPs, starts to page through some. "Which one?"
Takes another small jump. "The only one you care about. English."
She smiles, weirdly. "Oh, you know. About the same."

He snatches an image in her mind. A teacher, rumpily handsome. Now stands, briefly, in the class, from

his view. Sniffs first before really looking. Shrooms taught him that too. Smells like perfume, jackoff, damp pussy.

Sees a little. She's in the front row, off to the side, listening with every pore, but not looking up at him. Using sniff to guide his vision, he traces at least two boys' paths to her. One lightly, one almost too intensely to know. She traces back to them, somewhat, but to me there is a deep path, a road, a highway so hard travelled he gets why she cannot look.

Another jump. "Are you going to see him again soon?" She freezes. Whoever I am, she's uncertain of me, has told me her story in vague terms so far. Was going to tell me more soon. Maybe.

"It's OK. I know. Don't worry. I wouldn't tell."
She likes me but there is little eros between us. It's there, but that's always true between every human being the big stupid obvious secret.

She doesn't look up. Ah. Her way. I again consider the rumpled sweater. Pretty tasty in there. Consider below, Has he—have they? No more than once or twice—once—*ahh*—

Think now. There's always more than one force at work simultaneously. Shrooms taught me this too. They put it like humans are hung from tangled yanking strings & each has a personality summed from the conflicts of these strings, little more, but OK, their lesson was look in as many directions *at once*—what is yanking? An old hunger? A new? What kind? What is your body doing? Why aren't you paying it more attention? They would ask me more about my body than my thoughts. It's talking to you, Bowie. *You* are talking to *you*, Bowie. Are you hearing anything?

So I sniffed that the girl's been fucked once, recently, probably by the teacher, who she has a passion for, & I'm one of her friends, but not the two boys in English class who are chasing her too—probably not knowing they've been beaten, easily beaten—

Am I gay? That would make sense but no, I'm in my own body, I sniff that still-tight pussy of hers with more than scientific interest—

She suddenly shows me an album. Its cover seems to show a small space shuttle bursting from a sphere, in a shattering burst—I look at her—

"It's Journey's new album"
Look still—
"*Escape*? We were waiting for this! Where are you today?"
"Oh yah. Sorry. You know."
I'm grateful to see her nod & smile.
It means something. I jump.
"Let's get it & listen to it at your house."
She cringes. I bet it's not the money.
"OK. Mine works too." She nods, smiles.

A record store. Vinyl LPs. It's beautiful. I slow our walk on to find the copyright date of this album. 1981. Oh. Look at the cover again. A sort of fantastical theme. They were a rock band. Not a major one, but popular for a little while.

None of this is helping.

She's uncertain if we're ready to leave yet. I decide to piss the mushrooms off.

"Did you like it?"
"What?"
"When he fucked you? Was it a hotel room? That's my bet."
Smacked hard, she freezes.
"He brought you somewhere first. Not anywhere around here. Dark, cozy."
She stares at me.
"He went slowly at first, with candles & kisses. But then he told you his fantasies. Bondage, maybe a whip."
She still stares.
"You liked it because he did, it pleased him. But then you started to like it anyway."
She smiles. Weirdly.
"Next time you want to do the tying. You think about it all the time. How much you want to do that."
She nods. "Bowie . . . "
"Tell me something. Tell me *what the fuck*."
"Look at the album. That's you."
"And the sphere?"
"It's them."
"Tell me."
"They want to offer you a deal. A way to distance yourself."
"So they can't do this? Take the *fuck over* at will?"
"Yes. Not totally, but more."
"What then."
"It's about the White Woods."

It was one of many shards from his childhood, memories of his father, pieces that might or might not sum to the same picture. The White Woods. Maybe. Yes.

They had lived in several homes along the way, at least two he remembered. An earlier one, bigger than the later, had a study his father used. Books from ceiling to floor. A massive desk, like a boat with drawers & an old copper lamp. That room. He dreamed of it sometimes for many years later, especially of when he'd gone in alone.

The curtains were heavy, always drawn shut. There may have been an armchair, other furniture, but it seemed like the desk was not just king in size but in importance. His father did his work here, when he was home, many hours, usually silence when Bowie sat, small & crouched, listening at the door. But a very occasional murmur. No phone in there. Was he talking to himself, ghosts, aliens? Bowie would reject no possibility, then or now, & he knew more of them as the years passed.

Had he heard the phrase "White Woods" spake through that door? Maybe once. Maybe over & over. He could not parse remembered fact, dream, wish. But he had gone in, once, when his father was away.

Hadn't meant to. Well, maybe had but the room seemed forbidden. It was little if ever spoken of. At best, "I'm going to work. Good night." If that.

Had the door really been ajar? He had not turned the doorknob to push in, not then or ever. Fairly sure. The knob was shiny, like a Christmas tree ornament, distortingly reflective. He'd listen for

sounds of his father within & watch his own gloopy face listening.

Once inside, not breathing, he crept toward the desk. He was not afraid of his father as a son might be, fear of an angry word or a blow, more afraid for him. He'd told Gretta one time, "I inherited something from him, I'm not sure what. Even then, I could sense it. He was reluctant about it. I don't know if he wanted me to have it or wanted to protect me from it. Maybe both."

There was an open book on the desk, reached by creeping, barefoot as he was, through thick crimson-colored carpet, & crawling into a very large chair. A book. Possibly a manuscript. Bowie dared not touch it. Perhaps he'd learned already about fingerprints from one of his favorite TV shows. *The Fugitive*? There was another one too.

It was open on the desk, the pages milky warm in the light of the old copper lamp. He was young when they'd moved from that house—well before he'd hit double digits—but he could read well. His father approved of a book in his hands more than all else. Would make a gesture to wish to see the title he was reading. Nod, sometimes even smile. Other boys learned to throw footballs straight & true to earn such a smile. He intuited over time which kinds of books more likely earned it. Novels. Sometimes poetry. Rarely philosophy. Maybe science.

He leaned over the book, curled over it to near the words without touching.

> *dreams will become more real as you engage them more often. As separate as they seem from your waking hours, they are not. You must knit the two together, back together, & a different picture from the one you have now will start to emerge. This may seem foolishness. It is not. It is an unformed path ahead of you, one of many possibilities. More so than others, one you will likely never see except when looking back, & even then it will not look as expected.*

Somewhere in the house, there is a noise, he looks up. Nobody is home, nobody is expected home. The wind. He nods. Looks back down to the page but there are new words, & an image. A forest, woods, in winter it seems for all is white. He leans even closer, for there is a figure, that of . . . a girl. She is among the trees. Blonde, slender, a bit ragged in dress.

She moves. He blinks. She moves again, from partially behind one tree to another. She moves each time he blinks, during the blinks. He tries to trick her, half-blinking, fake-blinking, but it doesn't work.

Below this strange picture, the words: "Take back your mind, Bowie, & help others too. This is what I did until things changed. I let my mental toughness & my empathy both weaken. It was what I couldn't say to you back then. What I should have tried to say anyway. I say to you now. *Take back your mind & help others too*"

Bowie starts, fully awake. Not in his childhood home, not in that record store in 1981. No, this is now. Where he hasn't been.

"*Take back your mind. Help others too.*" Bowie nods.

* * * * * *

LAST CHANCE
Casanova

# Part Seven

*"Take back your mind.*
*Help others too."*

Well. Let's see. Here the brief bastard child of before & hereon. Yah. I suppose. Reach forward by reaching back, reaching around, maybe lucky & reaching under.

Tell me something. What do they do for you anymore? Still something? Still everything?

Let's say something. Let's say that the tools are familiar & how do I use them?

Let's say from that angle. Ain't black ink's fault when my days are page-blank. Ain't psychedelia's fault when I'm high & only see new ass with old eyes.

The lights are shining tonight, it's to my mind & hand to wield unto music & beauty, or dully refrain.

I've looked around from ground level, looked hard, listened, paid some hours to what the groundlings say.

Let me say, or let me fucking say, nothing, freak spasms of fantasy, *nothing*.

There's nobody else here right now, this stage is empty. I've tried this a few ways now & no answer yet.

None but the old. A song from *Tommy* in the air & I go all Rich Americus & band on stage ecstatic.

Just listen:

*If I told you what it takes*
*to reach the highest high*
*You'd laugh & say 'nothing's that simple'*
*But you've been told many times before*
*Messiahs pointing to the door*
*And no one had the guts to leave the temple*

There. So now say there's an old album on the stage with me, & a phonograph. Enough.

None but the old answers. Music:
Art. Nature. Dreams. Psychedelia.
Eros. Magick. *Music*.

The lights are shining tonight, here & all around. Always a full moon. Always beauty when a hand reaches, an eye yearns, a mind quiet or noisy wishes nakedly.

I believe in the conditional virtue of men. Like the comic said, a man's as good as his options. But, I add, having wondered on this line too long, it's what he *considers* his options that flesh the formula.

Moonlight in one hand, the other in a manacle. That's how it feels. I look from hand to hand, acting the one way or the other. Nobody in these stories acts otherwise.

But what else. The moonlight & the manacle. Nobody gives me moonlight, tis not mine, twas here before me & will illumine my dust in the air one far day—it's the manacle—

Surely the manacle sourced in being human, born a place & time, the flesh of particular flesh, the genes of those genes, & the many ways carried along helpless for years, causing decisions I did not make, living unexpected results, becoming by accident again & again—

At some point, however, the manacle is in my possession, in my hand, clasping my hand, pulling my hand back or down, or releasing enough for my pen miracle to go & go & go——

And now, tonight, the lights here & everywhere? The music in my ears as best always? Manacle, I say. Manacle? I ask. Yes, even beauty. Yes, every hour. Yes, manacle is miracle is now without cease until dust indeed upon the moonlight & perhaps even then in some way still—

*But then—what then?*

*The manacle. The miracle. The music.*

Music is the miracle of the manacle. What prisons also frees. (*Take back your mind. Help others too.*) (Bowie nods) (Hey! Off my empty stage.) (Page. Yah. You & the LP. I get it.)

*What then—what then?*

There's no losing the manacle, pulling, at rest, compelling, answers, no answers,

"You're either in the band, jamming toward that highest high, or you're in the audience, arms crossed, watching, being fed, tasting another's miracle without one of your own to share"—

I nod. Take back your mind.
Show others how.
Bowie nods.
"How?"
"No manacle. No miracle. Only music."
Shit.
Bowie nods again.

"You almost ready?" asks Maya, edging onto the page. I see her version of *Labyrinthine* is now carried in a paisley-looking shoulder bag.
"That's nice."
She nods, won't get distracted.
"A little slow tonight."
She nods. "Notes all organized yet?"
"Almost."
She almost laughs.
"1200 pages is a lot."
She nods. Looks to Bowie. He shrugs. "Nothing wrong with some notes."
She looks at me again. "How many pages of notes?"
"40 pages, I think. Typed."
Maya looks back at Bowie. He shrugs.

She turns to leave the stage. "Just start soon. Everything's ready."
Picks up my *Tommy* LP. "I'll put this away for you."
I wonder what that means but don't ask.
I nod.

"Look around, hear voices, from the strangest things, each object wanting its moment, its due, a recognition that it too exists validly in this world. I wonder: is this wrong? To see the jar & notice as its contents diminish & wonder its satisfaction when it is empty & ready to move on?

"A soda can. A rubber band. A newspaper. A computer file. If one allows one's empathy to leak, frees it to forage beyond human faces, what then? How to communicate to what does not speak in human voice or words in return?

"What if everything is alive, not just existent? What if men move blindly, wield their power worse than half-gone hungry brutes? What if men, far from being the custodians of the world their books fancy them up to be, are—"

"Mac, tie it up & drag it to the trash"

"Why?"

"You don't gotta have heart-to-hearts with every soup can in the gutter to be a decent person."
"No"
"No"
"What then?"
"You gotta just be aware. Maybe the soup can isn't interested in you. Maybe, using your thinking, it just wants to do its thing & move along."
"So the can contains a spirit performing the can's task, & then passes to what's next?"
"Look, how do I know? I'm just saying you can't see the worst possible in people, & still live a good life among them. Don't shoot your head in the foot."
"Yah. Thanks."
"No charge."

"What then?"
"Make it good as you can, no matter what that means, the best & worst of you down here on this page"
"How deep is deep?"
"You've hardly yet found out. When you never leave the page, at it or not, then something, somewhere."
"Everything's alive"
"Fine. *Start there*."

*i.*

*You won't know it by name, & therefore hesitate to call it home, you'll slide about the music, the shine, & the words sticking deep then smiling letting go—*

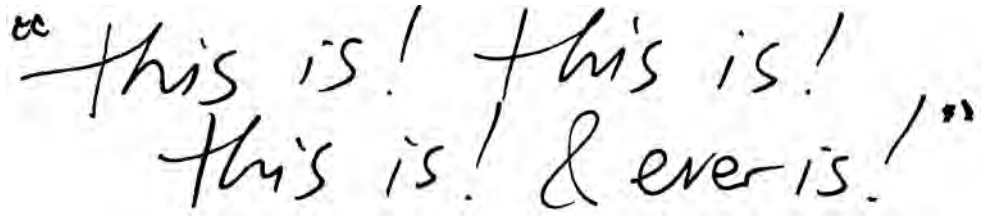
*You will wish to know more, marvel*
*at how much you are marvelling:*
*the pretty girl dancing*
*that old man talking to trees*

*those shakers & dancers*
*rising that bonfire,*
*what years pass!*

*What lets go. What resists.*
*A moment comes, without wind, without*
*cold.*
*What resists. What lets go.*
*(Moment passes, a regret, an instruction)*

*When the light moves in again,*
*a stirring in many slumbers, some*
*of the mystery retreating, a recession*
*in heart's long night fever not sharply*
*recked by your science or your god,*

*let memory's best ear come*
*forth, let your deepest song cry out,*




*Let it cut, let it stain, let it ever sheer a bit from the chains of daylight & its men—*

*Yes. There. Set it out like that, or near to. Tis music from the Ampitheatre, a food in this place, this place without ordinary time & place, yes, there.*

*Here. And so long ago. How does its milk keep coming fresh & nutritive? I ask, I wonder, I do not know. Maybe don't wish to. Maybe don't want to remember so much as a push on. OK, it exists, here it is, on my pages, in my mind, here it is. Who am I now, here in this place of there & then, no see this is how I work, I push now & then & other nearer, nudge daylight & dreaming, shake my head, shake my all at borders, boundaries, the little useful ways human conduct predicates on worst instincts, least generosity, no empathy, no maturity, no tribe of two legged creatures wandering the globe unknowing often hopeful, afraid, feeling too many things & which one to believe, yes, which?*

*Uh, yes, um. A breath, a beat, & move it along, deeper than the Ampitheatre? Dreamland. White Woods, where* ***RemoteLand*** *is filmed. Noah Hotel? I'm asking around my mind what another page may help me to answer, another hour's try——*

I try again. That is, Maya does. Blonde hair pink striped down, nothing but her pink bra & panties, straddling across my lap. Blue eyes too fucking smart for my liking.

"Tell me."
"What."
"Tell me."
"Nothing. Get off."

"No. You like this."
"I do. Now get off."
"You want Jazz more?"
"Maybe. It doesn't matter."
"Why?"
"Because it's not the point."
"We're your primest pieces of girl-meat."
"I didn't say otherwise."
"Tell me then."
"I need to figure out something here. Not just that I want to fuck you."
"What?"
"I don't know."
She nods. Kisses my cheek. Mercifully, she gets off me. The hotel room clarifies a bit. Oh, this place, where all of them played their card game.
She doesn't dress right away. Keeps me agitated by it.
"Don't fret."
"You're nicer when you're not talking to me."
She laughs. "That's strange, isn't it?"
I nod.
She picks up her pink Jimi Hendrix t-shirt. Smiles at me.
I sigh. Pat my lap.
She sits back down facing me.
"This doesn't accomplish anything."
She nods, kisses my cheek.
"You can stay where you are if you help."
She nods.
"What am I doing wrong?"
"Nothing."
I stare darkly at her but she holds my stare blithely.
"I need answers. And good luck"
She nods. "I know."
"How?"
"Ask?"
"I have. I am. I don't know how else."
She leans against me. Sincerely.
"Tell me."
"I love Dylan."
"But?"
"I want what you have."
"Oldness? Inaccessibility?"
"No. The power. Even at the worst."
"I don't feel it."
"You do. At the worst. You do."
"OK. But it doesn't wield as I like."
"You mean for a job."
"Yes."
"It's not like that."
"You mean useful?"
She laughs, wriggles her fine little ass around in my lap to punish me.

**Jeremy Kilar**

"Enough."
"It's practice. For Dylan."
I frown.
"You'll let us? Or do you?"
"Look. This isn't getting things along."
"Just fuck me. Over on that bed. Now."
"No."
"You'll like it. I promise."
"You mean that part about how you neuter men? Or was it seed them? I don't remember."
"That's Dylan. You just get hot young ass."
I shake my head.

Try again. There's always a try & always an again, at least so far, & I suppose I carry it like a faith with me. There will be a pen in my hand, I will *try*, I will try *again*. Art as faith, faith as a verb, a carrying along like one carries beat & breath, a faith in the doing, & in the doing again—too many words for a simple idea.

Nod. Look up to the TV screen at Luna T's Cafe's bar. A bank robbery, ambulances taking bodies away, the would-be robbers, the latest report said a father & son team, imagine that, local too, both unemployed, at least a lot of the time, the father had had his shares of tussles with the law, a wife-hitter, till she left him, & a couple of drunken barfights. But a gun? And his son? A jock, a football player, had set a couple of records too, but he'd dropped out, a pregnancy scare with one of the many cheerleaders he'd bedded, drinking & partying too much, his old man pressuring him to get a fucking job, ring down one of them curvy pieces before they all got took & *settle the fuck down*—

Only she wasn't. Pregnant, that is. Just a virgin & scared when her period a couple of days late. Then it came but he'd proposed. Me? Fuck. I don't know. You love me? I waited for you. Until you were done with all the other sluts on the team, I knew you'd come sniffing. What I'd been saving for you.

And it hurt too but *godd* it felt *good* too. Listening to you moan for *me*, knowing it was my body you wanted, well, shit, I almost *wish*—

No—I mean fuck no. That's my mother's generation, get knocked up young & that's that. We got options now I mean, even if I had been—

But I wasn't. And fuck if you were strangely pissed off at me. *What the* fuck.

But you were. All the other girls thought I was getting it from you all the time but shit if that first time wasn't *it*. It's like I won you, then I owned you, then I lost you completely. You didn't chase any of the others, either, old or new. Nobody knew what the fuck. Then we graduated & moved on. It happens.

So yah I was working part-time at this garage, it wasn't bad, I can fix shit, my old man taught me that much. How to fuck a girl so she stayed fucked, & how to fix an engine. How to throw a pass too, but that was like twice—

Yah, & you were falling down fucking drunk off your case of MGD. Lousy fucking Broncos couldn't win a fucking pie-eating contest after Elway left. But you'd take me out the back yard, the one we shared with the rest back then—*fuck you! I'm playing ball with my kid!*—that usually shut up the neighbors—you were big & loud & they saw how Ma kept her voice low & her shirt buttoned high—

But it was you started it—like your old man—he'd taught you—cocked behind the ear, straight & true, point to your target, snap your wrist, works every time—that's what I got—& I was tall—taller than you—you'd been a second stringer—I think the starter was so much better & such a nice fucking guy you just let those ideas go—it didn't hurt too much—

Then you saw me throwing for the same damn school & nobody taller, & my throw the one

you'd fucking gifted me with before I had any idea—or you—

You saw the cheerleaders go for me & that burned too—you'd been the pet of your own day, they'd give you a pity fuck, a friend fuck, but nothing to crow about, nothing a guy could really call his own drinking with the rest—no begging, not much moaning, just some fun when you were remembered & they were bored & horny—

What I knew was that there wasn't going to be any college money—me & the coach had gone toe to fucking toe on it—he laid it on the line, the good for nothing prick—too small a school, hard times, blah fucking blah, maybe a partial, maybe the second year—just fucking bullshit—

And the worst of it was that the one you'd finally knocked up—or almost—I'd nearly had her six months before—she'd been trying to get you into her panties for longer than that—finally she just came over one night when you were out with one of the other ones—& laid it on the line.

"Dontcha like?"

"What's not to like."

"Fresh. You like fresh, doncha, Mister?"

"Yah. Fresh."

"And tight. You know how tight, Mister?"

"How tight?"

Grinding her hot little ass in my lap, hand against my thicking cock, whispered wetly in my ear. "So . . . fucking . . . tight"

I nearly creamed there, or just a couple of easy maneuvers & I would have been hard inside those panties of her, she was playing me, I know it, somehow trusted she could take me this far & still control it—

I was almost beyond caring—she'd found me home, drunk, alone on a Saturday night—I could have spent a fun few hours deflowering every inch of her—so close—so tight—until she said—

"In his room"

"Hm"

"Take me in his room"

For her, leaving her cherry stains on his bed sheet, had by his old man to boot, must have seemed like the drop dead biggest turn-on. For me, it wasn't. It was just admitting defeat.

I dogged her a little though. I was still hard & she was still half-nude in my lap. I could tell she was already out of her league when I let her kiss me tongue-deep, she liked that, but my practiced fingers on her nipples, that was good but strange, feeling me squeeze, cup, tease the nipples, pinch, pinch harder as I squeezed her in my lap, made her stay put, she was panicking a little, so I slowed us down, more kissing, more caressing, I moaned more, calculating how much I wanted, how much was worth it, eventually I had her between my thighs, she was sucking way more than she ever had, more than pretty girls like her usually do, unless there's real love or a competition, I kept her down there awhile & my fingers got all under her skirt, got her panties rustled up some, made sure, made damn fucking sure, we came together, made sure I took her there, on the couch, in front of me, now get out, what? Get the fuck out you fucking whore & I won't tell him you were here to blow his old man. No. But. It was a genuine pleasure, the wrong kind but still it's true, to watch her trying to pull herself together. Half-fucked, half-not. Plan didn't work. Still horny. Embarrassed. Every pretty little fucking cheerleader who ever shook her ass at a crowd of hard dicks she'd never had to satisfy should have a humbling moment like that. To balance things out some.

Anyway, that's who you almost knocked up. I laughed when I heard & decided karma is fucking real. Then when she wasn't, I *knew* it was.

And I told him. Some of it. Enough, as they say. Wonder why you didn't get him again? He couldn't shake the picture of you trying to seduce his old man from his cock. Turned you way on, him off. I bit off a piece & called it good.

Anyway we went out on my 18th birthday & buried the hatchet once & for all. I was going to work, try to find a girl who didn't shake her titties for crowds or hang from a pole—that's the wifing type—the girls hanging from poles were great, for fun, we almost shared one that night, fuck, Pops, I would have, why the fuck not, those whores love the threesomes, a little extra money, make sure they ride the rails hard before you ride them—I would have—

But you sat outside in the hall, smoking weed, calling this a birthday present, how a working man gets his relief every now & again—I paid her extra to sound like I was hitting her a little—I knew you'd love that—I fucking wish we had—

Instead it's weeks later & we're both jobless & drinking too much. I'm reading about some famous politician coming to my high school's commencement—why did I drop out again? Trying to work that one around in my head—not doing so well with it—

And your sorryass buddy from high school, everyone called him Philly because he was from east when he was a kid. I think it's cuz he was as girly as a she-colt. His idea puts us in that truck, driving to that bank, that fucking morning—

And me? The one they both had? I moved on. I had to. Not that I wanted to. By now, by the time I was graduating, I wanted both of them. In my bedtime fantasies, it could work. Marry one, fuck them both. I figured I could keep them both satisfied. I'd been listening to locker room secrets for years, how to keep more than one man satisfied, it could be done if the girl really wanted to, if she was in love or . . . undecided. Or maybe just some fun.

Once you got used to laying with a man, satisfying him, getting some for yourself, it's awful sleeping alone too many nights in a row. A few nice, a couple, nice to have the bed alone, crack a fart or two, catch up on some reading, or just do your nails & drink wine. They mostly think nails are for scraping down their backs as you moan.

Eventually I moved out of the dorms & took my own place. My mom could afford it. She divorced my dad while he still loved her, so the settlement was way too generous. Hence I get a two-bedroom apartment with a porch.

I'm standing on it, now, & I'm thinking about both of you. I saw the news on TV like everyone else. *What the fuck* were you thinking? The moment I heard a cop was shot & in the hospital, I knew you two were done. They're like fucking Klansmen-close in that town. None of them could get a cheergirl at gun-point. Well maybe a gun but nothing else. The story was you all shared & didn't mind some blood.

So I knew. You injured one of them, they shot to kill both of you. That simple. The message kept the peace mostly, probably more than in some other places.

I watch the moonlight & Mister Moon has no answers for me, save that my thighs are still grinding for some action. I even had them on the computer & the phone for awhile. But it was too easy. Too pathetic. One started getting too close anyway. Couldn't have that. Married. Kids. *I just wanted to get laid—*

Now I'm in bed & thinking why the fuck did you do that? Why aren't you both in this bed with me? Why aren't we fucking & sucking our brains out?

Maybe I'll ask Benny tonight—he likes to tell me things—it's been awhile—I know how he avoids me—how I know what he needs—what makes him crazier than he is—

*ii.*

A matter of view. So much is a matter of view. At one point I say, "I was hurt & angry & my pain was belittled or unnoticed for years."

Then I add, "A poor youth but happy, the rest a heart's carnage of years, want & beauty a wild mixture."

I pause, nod, whoever I am, & conclude: "I cry this to you tonight because you feel it too, & may reply."

Someone says, "Happy birthday, brother!" & I cringe—

It, this, could go one way or another. Each sentence comes after a hesitation. This way, that way? I'm not sure.

The boldest voice within says, simply, "Push on."

A matter of view, I come back to that again. What to do with it?

"Come on. It's OK to relax once in awhile. Let your hair down."

I nod, yah.

It was about 30 years ago that this story began, thousands of pages, & I wonder: if events had occurred differently, would I still be writing it? Would that be better or worse?

A matter of view. That's what I come to now.

"You don't let up, do you?"

I nod.

It just doesn't mean anything to me, this birth day.

An arm rounds my shoulder & pulls me close. "What then, pal?"
"I don't know."
"Want to start again?"
"Yah."

*Luckily, the pink-nosed white bunny flashes past, & I make to follow, knowing that way is no way, & following isn't possible but the gesture is a gesture, moving is moving & once the landscape starts to shift, the light breaks up & is moving again too, & I am following though it is not a way & I try not to hunger it for a way, for the point & tell, for the explain of the flow, & the comfort, the love & pity, no, I follow the pink-nosed white bunny to know & not know both, a deliberate act of hitting into the Mystery for what it may yield me or another, the white bunny up ahead, further & further, I try not to wish nearer, please nearer, please comfort & explain, but no, it's a big mirror, hard to see all, a big mirror, hard to know or not know, a choice to see the stars & reck them high or be revealed down here low, following the pink-nosed white bunny into the lights, & I try to stop, I doubt & try to stop, so hard, & doubt, & pain, & why this, just stop, but not yet, no, follow this way that is not a way, yes, & please, I am looking for the way that does not explain but stays, a way kind but not stupid, knowing but not stupid, faithful but not stupid, the white bunny slows, looks at me, querying, I nod, speeds up, I make to follow but do not, I let the white bunny flash on beyond, another day, another hour—*

"Want to start again?"
"Yah."

Jamie, after Maya left, after the many drinking nights with Muddy, after the several nights Muddy & he snorted rails & sucked each other down, after a whore or two, clean of course, Muddy was from rich people, had numbers, all clean, do what you like, all discretion, no hitting, at least too hard, & nearly losing his job, how does a fucking programmer lose his job? Software engineer what the fuck ever, went to detox, funny shit given everyone else, but yah, you can eat or ingest smoke or fuck what you please but you show up, do the fucking job, & her taste wasn't leaving him, not even close, it wasn't right, what had they done anyway? See, he wasn't sure. She slept in his bed, could see he expected it, & he'd,

& he'd, but, what, what? He'd protected her, is what.

She was scared. She was hot as fuck, but scared. She cowered in my arms from things I couldn't see, scary fucking things I couldn't see.

It went on like this. She'd sleep while I was at work, on my couch, on that shit-old knitted thing my grandmother gave me, sleep all day, or what, I didn't know

& all day long at work I'd think of that luscious little body of hers & how closely I'd held it, & I wanted to in every dirty way that I did to those money whores later—

but I didn't. Not to Maya. I began to disassociate from her instead. A part of me wanted to fuck her badly, rent the cotton, hear the pleas, take it, but another part of me went elsewhere, somewhere she led, or pointed toward, I'm not fucking sure, but I went there, it was yah scary at first but I went further than Maya, where she couldn't, I hacked my way deeper in, it wasn't hard, nobody ever had, the fear was a defense enough before, who would breach the White Woods, not taken there but find a way in? Not for revenge but . . . curiosity.

That last night I woke up almost screaming, I was in the Beast's jaws, I woke & you were between my legs sucking & licking me, moaning, awake, asleep, how to know? You were good, like you'd long known how to ride my cock closer & further, you kept me from cumming till I was crying, closer, further away, how could you know, yet you did

but I made the wrong move, leaned forward, kept me deep in your mouth, struggle, suck it, struggle, choke, *suck it bitch*, finally you relented & sucked so hard & long I passed out, *what the fuck*, I woke up, you were sleeping, I didn't know if it had or not—

And you were gone & eventually I was here all the time, I hacked my way in & stayed, the White Woods is easier now, now that I stay—

"Again?"
"Yah. You like it."
"Yah."

*How deep the poison's wild mixture in our blood, want & music, how high to reck the endless woods yearn through all?*

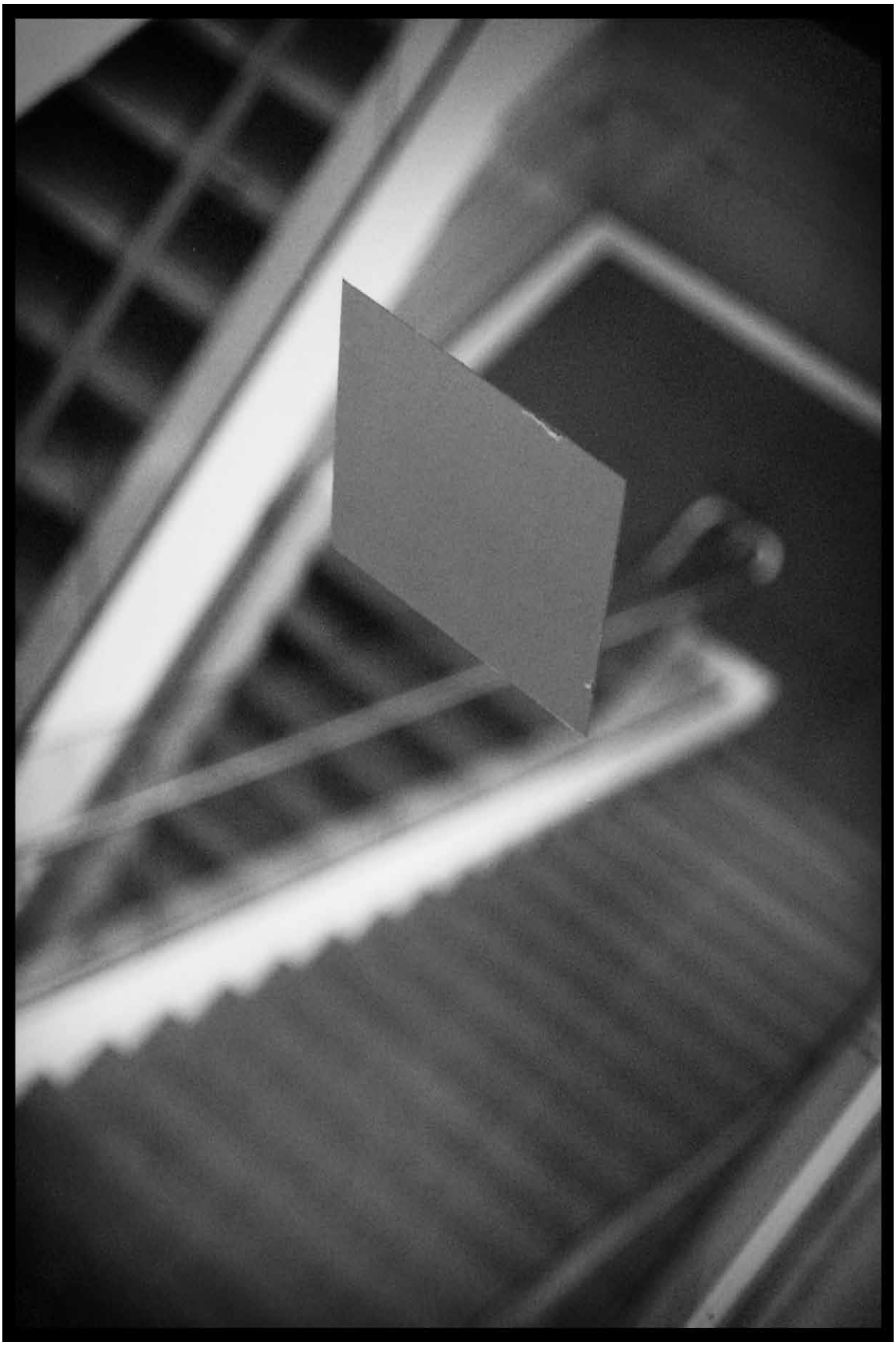
Christa understood all that. That she'd be leader. Years before it happened, or began to. It was simple, they left her be when one by one the rest were led off. She wasn't. The so-called initiations were a lie. The costumes, music, the lighting. Pure bullshit. She'd seen it. Was led one night half asleep & complaining to watch.

*World's puzzle disintegrates, reinvents every hour, while many a man through centuries will smile & think its formula cornered in a doorway*

*close, so close, soon to know, to tell all, till a ship, or a jingle, or a thousand black wings up & beyond that spire.*

Yah. She watched. She learned. The ways to work a psyche, soften & program it. Create a new landscape, a series of altered protocols, priorities, beliefs.

And the funny thing was: she was jealous. How they shed their garments so easily, for the chains, the costumes, the hundred cameras to record every cumming tremor, she stood among them more wanting than they knew, & saw the rest get it & not care it was bullshit for her benefit—well not bullshit but still—those fucking words—



*Little answer to this world but each touches each & a mystery runs through all, now the hungry woman who smokes with solitude's juices in a bed that remembers twined nights of blood & despair, now two tribes will war unto annihilation for possession of a dead god's graveyard, now a brave man who—*

Yah. Um. Yah. Just, yah.

Just one taste back then, if you'd taken just one fucking taste, I wouldn't have left with Bowie.

Now that I'm coming back, it will be with Bowie. If I can persuade him. Just awhile I think I can.

"Life always leaves something open. That extra." You wanted more from me, Jack, & I didn't give it to you. I saw where you were going long before you got there. That Bridge of Glass. All that fine pussy you played badly & worse on the way. But that's what you got, & the like. It was all warnings for you to remember since I couldn't tell you the truth.

I'd followed the pink-nosed white bunny, followed her far from the stink of old ideas & ancient demons, unseen enemies & the rest. And I'd given it all a good run for its money, my best manhood days no less potent than yours now.

Your bevy of pussy a handful. Boy, I woke regular with several in my bed. They learned the catfighting did nothing for me. And just getting dirty bored me too. I taught them better, taught them to work each other's bodies better than all that, give her what you've been wanting most, it sounded simple but it worked. They'd come around to me & I'd collect thanks all around.

By when you found me I was long a creation of dead days, long loyalties, old breaks. I was tired, I'd drunk the juices. The last night I felt it best that craft or planet hung so low in the sky, we'd walked outside, didn't usually do that, some of the neighbors looked at me twice living unmarried with several women who smiled quite often & got along better than women were supposed to—we were high, those mushrooms weren't Pez, but the ships were closer than usual & they wanted to go, they pushed me, *let's go, let's leave this, come on, please,* they were ready to come back with me I'd told them, they were ready,

I took them back in the house, had each one slowly while the others smiled & watched, that night I felt tired after, not elated, not full of gratitude, thrilled, no, tired, tired, Jack, *ahh shit*—

I dozed, dreamed of that collie, oh, sweet, there you are, how? So far. You . . . speak? Um. OK. Tweety Bird. Yes. She's here. You and she . . . Oh. Repeat that. No. Tell me, I want to know. Please. I can't understand. I'm still wagging tail friendly. Do you know a better way? Will you show me?

(*Breathe. Move. Feed. Mate. Spend.*
*Expend.*

(*A gift. The glare, the sugar, every fermenting hour with no final arrival. A secret. A joke.*

(*A matter of view.*)

*iii.*

He said, "Stop singing from your knees" & I suppose I understand that right off.
I say, "So how?"

"Trees bow to nobody, just offer their fruit, their shade, what they have."
I nod.
"So how?"
"Stand up."
"Aren't I standing?"
"No. Not lately."
"This is all I've got."
"You've got more. Easy, you've got more."
"You tell me."
"Stand up."
"Fuck you."
"Yah. Fuck me. But stand up."
"Does little good."
"It's enough."
I nod.
"Not your legs."
"I know."
"Good. Don't do it for me. Do it for you. Because it matters to you. Or maybe you just want it to again."
I nod. "I do."
"So stand up. Here. Tonight. Always. I was standing to my last day. Long past when I had legs."
I nod.
"Tell me something for daylight hours. Not now, night, high. Then."
He looks at me, long & hard. "See that next page, blank & ready?"
"Yah."
"Don't touch it till you're standing up, like I told you. Not a word."

I'm back, a week later.
"Are you standing up?"
"I always was."
Silence. Then laughter. "Now that's something."
"I suppose so."
"What's your question?"
Now I'm quiet a moment. "Am I going to get my lucky break this time?"
"I can't tell you."
"Can't or won't?"
"It's not that easy."
"I want them to hire me."
"Yes. I know."
"Do . . . I . . . get . . . it?"
Silence. No more.

I nod. Wherever the rest, it's not here easy.

Maya sighs & takes my hand, as if her cue. We dance slowly, since neither of us can really dance well. I hold her lightly, feel the lightness of her frame, the way her eyes shift lightest blue to crimson—

"And now you'll sing to me—"

A daze, a dream of beauty, hard world cracks before this dance, & praise where there have been stunted gestures

She nods, leans her head lightly on my shoulder.

"We love others."
She nods.
"Then what you & I?"
"We're the same. I'm more you than you realize. Sing to me—"

Wait. Start again. A daze, dream of beauty, the world a waste, spark it new, now time itself will burn. Wait. Start again.

She nods. "Is this the rest?"
She looks at me. "Everything is the rest." Fades like light from my arms.

Cry out! (*iv.)* Something may listen, may heed, may give you a piece back (*iv.*) Would you have younger blood & bones, a lighter question of god astride your heart (*iv?*) Another chance to breach that cherry cunt with less reverent words, surer touch (*iv – her eyes were a pretty brown, her tits from what I could tell, were soft & fresh enough—her cunt was Catholic girl-tight & any girl waiting for mind to release it to its pleasure & its work*) Does love teach best by variety (*iv.*), excess, (*iv?*), or absence (*iv!*) (*I was the boy who protected her, funny that, the one she didn't want to fuck, it almost seems to me tonight I'm near done playing this decades old what-if?)*

What would you have back,
which moment, what word?

Tonight I answer easily:
my Art came from that long shit of years, it is here, now because I didn't fuck her, & her, & the other ones, it's what good came, what I can hold & point to, what matters, not the clumsy hustles you put on me to keep me near while it felt good, but not too near—

Another hour with the dead, another hour with youth's lost brothers (*iv.*), another with a pen & a book, hours raising music in that shadowy green court(*iv*)yard?

What's broken what's gone,
what beliefs simply & discarded,
only dreams (*iv*), death, (*iv*),
& a surprising hour's return
(*iv*) anything—

I find myself at Luna T's Cafe, in the corner of the bar, sitting next to Rebecca smiling at me. Her easy, sure smile.

"I have a surprise for you."
"Uh oh."
"A good one. Come on."
We walk like old, hand in hand, through the oaken door, but something happens & it's not the band room. It's a bookstore.

"Um."
"I know."
"Um?"
"It's not done yet."
"Repeat: um?"
"It's the Arcadia Bookstore."
"Burned down."
She looks at me serious now.
"Haven't you wondered what I've been doing?"
"This?"
"I've been reading your old notebooks."
"Oh."
"There's nothing in them to forbid this."
"No."
"And your dream journals. All the dreams of bookstores."
I nod. "Does she make you, um, jealous?"
"Maya?" she laughs.
"Yah."
"Of course not. I'm married to you but I'm not what I'm not."
"What aren't you?"
"Young. You. I'm Rebecca. I re-create bookstores if I wish."
I nod. Now she smiles. "Good. Come and look."

She's recreated the Arcadia Bookstore & Cafe in detail it never had. I say as much.

"That was to my advantage. You kept it vague. It gave me room to improvise."

(*She'd long heard the sound of the sea in her dreams. All was silent, & the sound of the sea, it called to her, told her things, there are mysteries, Maya, mysteries in the world, mysteries deep in you, the places of men are small in truth, are noisy & small, no matter the seeming, remember this sound, no matter where you are, how deep in, it will remain when the places of men are flat, are gone, remember, Maya, remember. The seas, all silent & the sea . . .*)

"You're thinking of her."
"Yah. I was."
"Good. I'm glad she moves you."
"Yah."
Rebecca pushes me against a bookcase. "You're going to need us all. We're all going to have to come through for you."
I nod. "I don't know."
She kisses me, softly, deeply, a kiss that consumes me, a long unhad kiss, an intensifying moment, a long waited possession, reclamation, here she was again, wanting, giving, powerful—
Leans back. Smiles. Part the devil, part the sky.
I nod. "Alright."
"Alright?"
"Yah. I get it."
"What do you get?"
"I get that this book & me both, being two & one, each & both need you."
She laughs. "I love you too, Raymond."

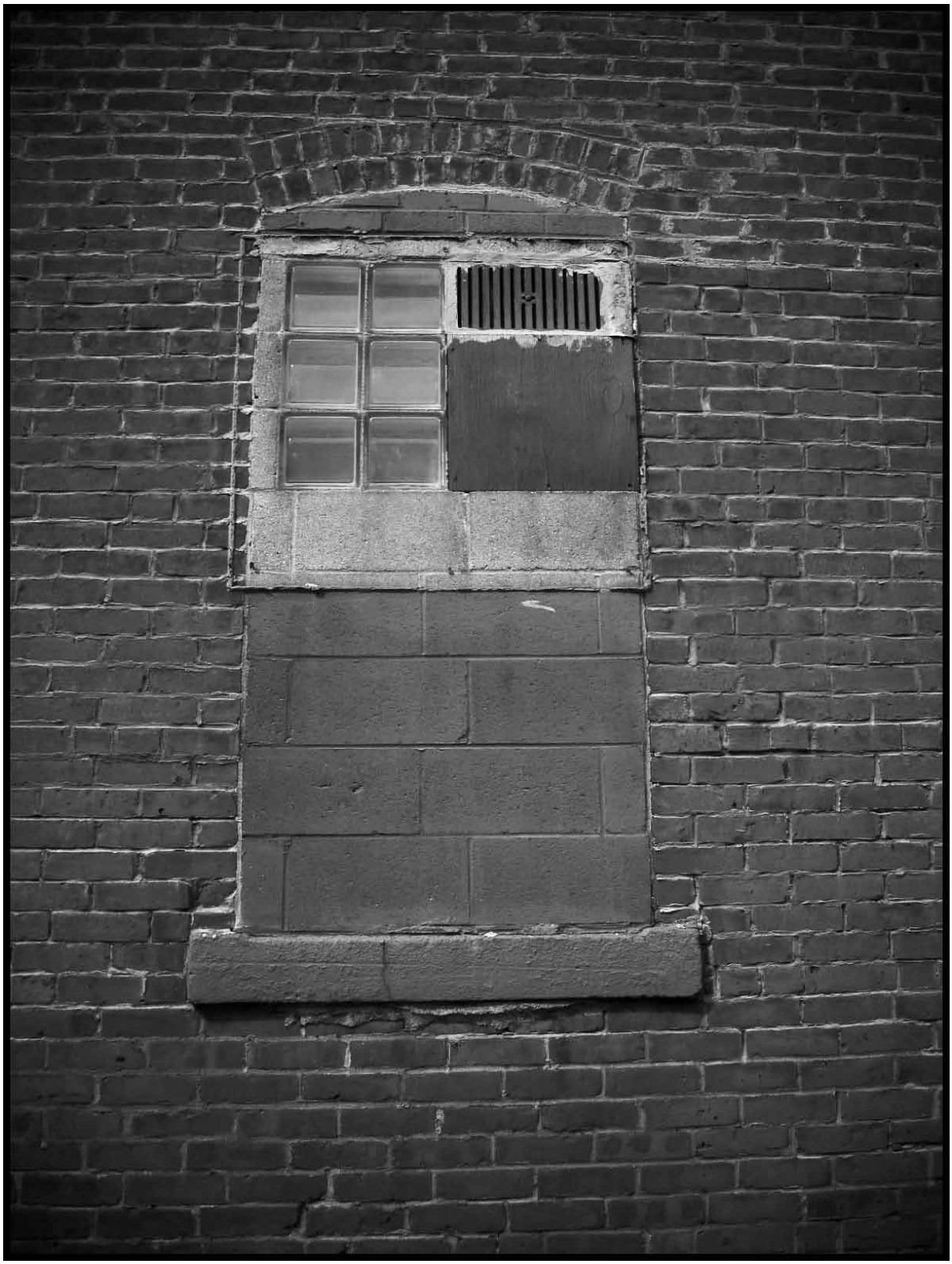
We resume walking around the Arcadia, now hand in hand.
"Two floors."
"At least."
"New & used."
"And records."
"Porn? Romances? Head shop?"
She nods, laughing.
"Are you going to run it?"
"As much as I run the Cafe."
"Ahh."
"I have a fellow already."
"Who?"
"Old friend of yours."
"Who?"
"Me," says Dylan. Steps around the corner. Oh.
"Oh."
He smiles. No wonder Maya loves him. Wow.
"You need us all," he says quietly.
"She said that too."
"I asked him," Rebecca says. Not defensively but looking at me.
I nod. "This makes a kind of sense."
"You suppose."
"I suppose."
"What then?"
"Nothing."
"Say it."

(*the sea, more than all else, sometimes those years she'd heard it on her pink radio, how, she had. She'd listen in her bed in the dark, the single pillow, the single blanket, sound of the sea, eventually, quietly, given over to it, it was never difficult, & the sea never refused her, she entered & was soon deep & deeper, it was like swimming but had she ever? She didn't think so, but maybe. Swimming, but an ease, a grace, this was where she was* from*, not a visitor, she was from here & this was remembering & how good it felt to do this, swim & remember, deeper & deeper, where too black to see she saw, where lungs could not breathe she breathed, with ease, ahh, but what was all that back there? Her,* back there*, that skinny girl, eyes shut, clasping her cat-shaped radio, so close, her friend, what of her? A lie? A delusion? No. She was . . .* then. *And now, here, deeper & deeper? Yes, now, deeper*)

They're waiting, looking at me.
"Look. I go where I go."
They nod.
"She's from the sea. I don't know what this means, if it's a dead end or not. But she's from the sea."

I nod & leave them, return to it later. Maya is from the sea, she was taken from there, she is a primal thing taken from the sea. Why? By whom? It explains what she isn't, quite, a skinny hippie girl. What of Samantha? Her guardian, protector while she's not in the sea? Is any of this important?

She swims deeper & deeper, mouth slightly open, tongue moving, words, breaths, over & over, "source, source, source, source, source, source"



What, then, the years don't seem to bring evidence of the climb to stars. Still blind moles pushing & scratching in the dirt. I see this new & it amazes me. No lesson learned. No try to breathe together & feel the greater power.

What, then, I ask again, on a night when my pen is struggling to move.

I suppose I'll think tomorrow is another day & what is the music I want to sing but the better & lesser notes all allowed.

Source bears it all, & all of it comes from source, all is valid & I don't know what to make of that save a word not acceptance, no. Not quite.

If Maya is from the sea, & sea is source, then explains how she is not quite skinny hippy girl, how she is seen variously as code, key, conduit. How some planned to use her to neuter men & begin the long de-population, while another adjusted her such that she would never neuter, would, in fact, fertilize—

I am certainly wondering on this tonight, going over these things, & frankly unsure—

Then she beckons me with her—come down here, where I come from—come with me down here—take my hand, swim with me deeper in the sea—swim with me deeper in the sea—I nod & we go———

*v.*

Following Maya into the deep becomes more a chase down into the watery blackness after a blonde flash with pink stripe, & of course she becomes less leader as I become less follower, a game, this universe? Time + play? She's leading me further along but more further in there is an arriving—in to this but the what & the how unknown, I want to ask

*How, Maya?*
*I don't know.*
*Whereon?*
*I don't know.*
*I follow you?*
*& I you. & No.*

This is what I work with. She's not willing making it hard. This is both new & memory to her, this deep, long past when weight & darkness & lack of oxygen should have crushed us both, tell me something, Maya, now, tell me—

*This story misses you when you leave it be*
*I don't do it on purpose*
*It's as important as you let it be*
*Yes*
*As you make it*
*Yes*
*Do you understand?*
*I—do?*

*What you would know is here—*

*I'm not sure I'm after divination—*
*No—not that—more the how & the why—*

*Tell me—the how—*
*Make Art—every hour you can—*
*the rest is valuable but—*
*But?*
*Make Art*
*Yes—& why?*
*It will lead you home—*
*What is home?*
*here—& hereon—the answers show as you work—further in, further along—*

*Tell me—*
*Make Art—*
*Tell me—*
*Make Art—*
Tell me—
*There isn't anything else—nothing else is as important—nothing—*

*I believe that & I don't—*
*Make Art into everything—leave nothing out—*
*Ah—*
*Yes—*
*All that old shit—& the new shit coming along too—*
*Yes—all of it—*
*Make Art even when nobody knows or sees it as such?*
*<u>Make</u> <u>Art</u> <u>of</u> <u>it</u> <u>all</u>*

*We descend deeper—I can't say this is ocean anymore—*

*We're sitting in one of those lowly lunchrooms I've known so many years—Maya with me, usual scrawny hippie girl form, pink Jimi Hendrix t-shirt. Blonde hair, pink stripe. A delicious thing in her own way. But . . . ah . . . it's Maya . . . & so it's not even close to that fucking simple. She nods, smiles at me, nearly delighted. Motions.*

"I'll tell you several sinners of God's mysteries & his miracles & then I'll tell you what to do on all this." *The preacher is old, his frame gaunt to its last ounce, but a fanatical health running hard through his blood & bones—his half-listening crowd is more wheezing & sickly, partway between drunk & hungover as he speaks, yet they listen, some part of each hungers after something in his words, maybe just one word, but which? Which?*

*He fetches them food, makes them eat, every last one, there is a young matron's tenderness in how he ministers to each. They <u>will</u> each be supped & then he will each closer to his God.*

"Your lord will willing crawl with you through your every worst hour, your every sin. Every wanton snatch of woman you pay for & lay with." *Snickers. He quashes them with a breath.* "Every taste of liquor. Every curse you utter. Every way in which you can foul his creation with your careless hand."

*Pauses. They are listening. They are afraid. They listen.*

"Your lord does not dwell foremost in the pretty buildings where most seek his communion. The spectacles held there, the foppish morons who pretend to know his will & make to recite it from books of rhymes & chants. The simple myths men tell to explain the darkness to each other & yearn anew for daylight within & without." *He pauses again. The store manager is watching, listening as he does, not approaching yet. Knows something vital here must transact through.*

"You lord is in your very blood, in the musty clothes you wear. In each cigarette you light & in the slow darkening descending over your lungs & heart because of it. Your lord runs through every stenchy thread of your worn socks & crumbled shoes! The blotches on your skin! Your fetid sweating beds!"

*Does not yet approach but is closer. A game they play, of sorts, this preacher & the store manager, how long it will go on this time. How it will conclude.*

"I know none of you feel clean or healthy, or understand in any powerful way how close your lord is to you. You've been brainwashed into thinking that bits of wood are magically manifest with holiness, that words uttered in shaped song are needed to summon God for a word, that confession will cleanse & prayers might be answered.

"None of you, none, understand how beloved you are of your lord, how entwined in every fiber of your being you are with his will & wish for the Universe. No prayer! No confession. Tell the air you breathe it? Ask its leave each time you do?"

*Manager on the move. Slowly. He does not hurry. Not in the least.*

"As you leave here, as you return to your wanderings, your hustles through another day, think, if you can, think: neither good nor bad, neither sin nor virtue, just awesome high dirty brutal fucking perfection! Again & again! Awesome, high dirty, brutal fucking perfection!" *Screaming, the manager, holding him tightly, talking to him, whispering over & over, good, good, you did good, good, good, you did good, it's OK, it's OK now, it's OK, it's OK, it's OK———*

*Maya regains my eyes & smiles new at me.*

*I nod. What then.*
*Do you get it?*
*I like writing about crazy preachers & hot young ass.*
*She laughs. Shakes her head.*
*Yes & no.*
*I'd say yes & yes.*
*More to it, I mean.*
*I stand up, lean near her, kiss her cheek. Return to the surface.*

* * * * * *

*vi.*

*The air as I emerge recovers me with a love, an embrace I cannot explain. Rushes deep through me, lungs, blood, bones, wraps around my skin, smacks happy my face, would draw me even above the surface if I had wings to come. I am cold still but loved. No sign of Maya.*

*A small paddle boat happens along, sturdy if improbable, I climb in & meet two small black kittys with large hypnotic blue eyes, they insist me into a life jacket. Safety first. That done, they paddle us on, whether to shore or elsewhere I'm not sure I care. Had Maya sent them? So much is possible if one lets.*

*We sail on, through the open seas awhile, the kittys lick my cheeks occasionally but mostly we watch the movement of the water, the changing subtleties of the sky, it's peaceful—*

*then we sail through a door that appears before us & blinklessly are rolling through a strange land, rolling because the kittys boat has sprung out wheels to carry us—*

*I don't ask, I no longer think to ask. Why ask? They're good company, check my seat belts, drive steadily—*

*I don't ask because no question is here—*

*Till we finally pull up & stop somewhere—now the questions arrive too*

*The white bunny is sitting on the porch of a pink & white house overlooked from behind by a tall cliff—hmm—ahh—Maya's friend—*

*I leave the kittys in their boat-wagon & walk up to the porch of the white bunny, her sitting I notice in a low slung chair with a deep-scooped seat—she looks upon me steadily, gives me one sniff, a perfunctory evaluation, I guess I pass OK for now—*

*I sit down on the porch's wide planks & look around—aside from the bunny near me & the kittys in their wagon—now curled together into a waiting nap—, there isn't anything so odd here—*

*Do I speak? The bunny watches me calmly, a sentience in her eyes, not human per se, but not wild animal's either—*

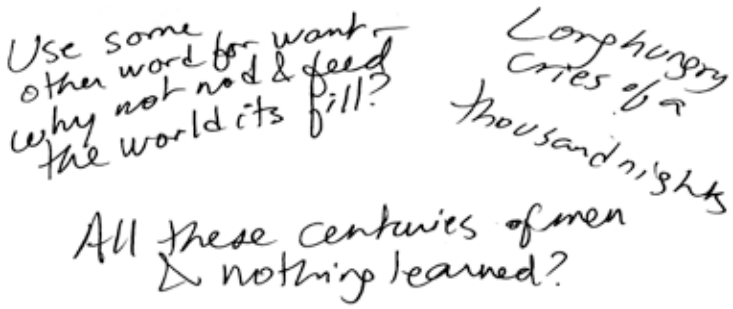
*So much is possible if one lets—*

*I speak. "I feel like I'm here because things have become harsher & darker & more difficult. It's like I've broke off a piece—another—of myself to venture deeper here—"*
*I stop. There is listening, but no reply.*

*"I've known you, all three of you, in other stories—& you, bunny, from afar in this one too—"*
*Go on—have to—"I truly feel however you are come to be, of me, through me, you are a strength I now carry with me"—now I stop—*

*The white bunny hops, twice into my lap, soft, lighter, smaller than I realized—sniffs once again, kisses briefly each of my cheeks, nudges me to return to the kittys boat-wagon—there's more of this to go—whatever this is—*

*The landscape is indiscriminate, to best say it, until we approach what appears to be an old covered bridge over a small twisty stream; the kittys pedal the boat-wagon right onto it & we keep rolling along. Wide planks, again, an old slatted roof above. There is writing carved into the side planks, a lot of it I notice. I stoop & climb to read, perhaps find a hint:*




*Um. Yah. The kittys wait for me to climb back in, then we roll on—*

*I begin to doze. There is sun overhead now, though trees also canopy what seems to be a much clearer path. But I doze through all this, safety belts on, kittys pedaling steadily along—I dream & begin to write—*

Maya, I came to you from very far, I think. For so long, my books had succored me & my years. I felt part of a legion of scholars, in all places & at all times, trying to assemble the puzzle of the world, each contributing something toward it. How I ended up naked in that field at dawn near the White Woods—

Not an easy answer. It began with a correspondence I had, the first time I felt deep emotions in me run for someone I had not met in person, yet had come to love in a way—

She wrote to me because I had written a brief essay on the stars in a science magazine she read one day in her doctor's office. Wrote to me via the magazine office in New York, so it took awhile getting to me.

She lived with a farmer & his three sons. She was orphaned, it seemed, & he'd taken her in. A widower, & her young & fresh, his intent was plain.

What was strange was the power she'd been given. She slept in his bed at night, the only bed offered, nude, as he preferred, but he never possessed her as he intended.

There is a legend, of the slave girl who kept alive by telling a fierce king tales every night, so he wanted more again.

She sang, this girl, instead of telling stories. But there was no radio & she knew only so many songs.

So I sent her letters of songs, this is how I saved her. She wrote to me because I'd written a short essay likening the cosmos to music, & each star to a unique song.

Now I was keeping her from being consumed by the farmer's appetites to replace his lost wife & start a new litter by sending her letters of song with instructions how to sing. She could not read music so I explained it all in words, how fast to sing, higher or lower, I sent letters every day, pretty much, as the farmer's strength against the songs grew. His lust, especially.

She stopped writing to me & did not resume. I figured we had either won & she'd escaped, or we'd lost, & she did not want to tell me. I never saw a picture of her, only knew her first name, Christina.

*I wake. Oh. OK. The kittys have stopped pedaling. They admire me with bright blue eyes, lick my cheeks, but still undo my safety belt. It's time to say goodbye.*

*vii.*

I got out quickly in the end, took nothing, she said *take nothing*, would have had me run naked down the road just to better separate me from all that—she said, when you go, go, don't look back, not once, forget how to return—I said I won't forget you, or how you saved me from this, or my friend the

scientist—she didn't look happy with this but nodded—me leaving with nothing would be enough—can I write to him? *No*. Once? To say goodbye? *No*. Why not? He saved me too. Gave me all the songs. *The songs are a weakness now, they have to go too*. But why?

She became . . . something else . . . & she said words I understood some other way. And I understood then that this would all go. She would destroy this farm. So much it would stand in ruins unremarked by almost anyone. It would be violent.

Will you hurt the little ones? She said nothing. I won't go. She looked at me all teeth & fire but I looked back. No. You won't hurt the little ones. They never hurt me. *You'll not see them again.* I don't care. Promise. She didn't wish to. We made a deal. I would go & not look back & she would spare them. Two of them. The two who didn't hurt me. She dressed me. In the middle boy's t-shirt & jeans. A pair of his sandals. No socks. No underwear. They were clean, she sniffed them closely.

I walked down the road in the direction she pointed & I did not look back. I felt her receding from me & it hurt me deeply, more than anything ever had.

"I love you," I said to the darkness before me.

"*I love you too*"

"Will I ever see you again?"

"*Maybe. In another form. In a long time to come. If you make it.*"

"Tell me what to do."

"*Remember this, like you said you had to. It won't be easy at times. It would be better if you didn't. But if you do, if you can, we will meet again.*"

"A long time from now."

"*Yes. Now go. Go!*"

"How do I do this?"

"*A truck will come by. Wave to it. Smile. Ask for a ride. Tell him you need a ride. He will not hurt you. It will be your start away from here.*"

After that, no more. She was gone. Really gone. I later dreamed what she did next. A dream, maybe.

I was an orphan, not sure how. And I couldn't remember my family. The farmer took me in, brought me to Clover-dale, introduced me to his three sons. One a little older than me in high school, one my age, one younger with the sweetest smile.

The farmer took me to his bedroom & opened an old trunk of clothes. His dead wife's. He handed me a plastic garbage bag & told me to dispose my clothes in the bag, & find in that trunk all I needed or would need to dress.

She was smaller than me by a couple of inches but I was able to fit into some of her dresses. They were short on me, tight. Showed more of me than I wished, & more tightly too. I was uncomfortable wearing the dead woman's clothes even as I couldn't say why. But he expected this. He showed me what that first night.

Sitting with me on the edge of his bed he opened his hand and pointed to his well-worn palm. Tapped it. "You," he said in his gravelly voice, accented some way. Closed the hand to a gnarly fist. "Me," he concluded. It never changed from this.

The boys went to school for half-days, home at noon to farm the rest of the day until sundown. It was his compromise with the town. He would concede no more to them than this & his prosperous farm was important.

I did not go to school. It was never a question. I was acquired & possessed & did not merit the

luxury of schooling.

I knew how to read, somehow, from my old forgotten life. As I explored the farmhouse & grounds I discovered books I *knew* he had never read or even seen. He had not built this. He had *purchased* it.

& I was acquired to serve. To cook & clean. Breakfast was prepared before dawn. Meat, eggs, toast. I knew enough to do this, prepare this meal & the lunches & the big dinners. None of them helped. Not once. The littler ones might have but it was forbidden. The girl cooks & cleans; we farm. There is no question in this. This way of life came to be very quickly after my arrival.

The nights ended after supper & the lesson. We sat & listened to him read from the strange old book. Not the Bible, I figured that out, nor any other book I knew of or would ever know. I don't think it was written in English & I really wonder if it was written in any other human language. But he spoke it aloud to us in English, in his strange accent. It never went on long enough because he was soon ordering us all to bed.

I learned, by accident, from the smallest boy, that shortly before I'd arrived he'd moved the boys to the other end of the farmhouse. Their two old bedrooms, eldest having his own, were now for other reasons, locked until one day I decided to see, were next to his. I came to believe he would not have them listening to what he planned to do with me. Toward that end, he'd move them to far rooms & locked them in at night. The pieces of all this didn't come right away. Really, I eluded him also by accident.

That first night I learned I'd be sleeping in his bed. I must have been sick, maybe even drugged, because I got into his bed agreeably enough. Immediately he shut out the light & said, "bare." There was no humor or flexibility in that voice. I took off his wife's dress & then paused. "Bare." I took off the rest & edged to the side of the bed. I heard him undress too & held my breath. I didn't know what but I suspected enough. My body crackled with alertness.

Would he have? Yes. Whatever I had been, however I had lived, whoever had loved me, I was bare in his bed, him too, & it was plain. He got in the bed & grasped me lightly from behind.

It was soft, for such a large man. A gentle grasp & I believe he would not have hurt me for pleasure. I believe that more than I would about the other men since. I was his prize, what he would re-build his world around, destroyed as it had been by his wife's death. Had it happened as he intended, he would have had me that night that hour, & it is possible I would have become his by heart & mind, not just body. No matter how terrified I was, that first grasping of me would have marked me his, & I willing, if not—

A word in my ear. Softer than the bedsprings as he curled around me, but a word & not his. "Sing."

Was it her?

Probably. Yes. Maybe. I don't know. In that order. Why unsure, seeing as she saved me later? I don't know.

I felt his hands moving in closer, to touch my breasts, my stomach, the rest, felt him already very hard, & for a moment I let him continue. For a moment I let. Then I began to hum. Hardly a song, more just barely shaped noise.

It was enough, he withdrew, I pushed the hum into music, the melody of a song I could not remember all of, so I hummed the bit twice & then shifted it to another & then realized he was asleep. Curled into himself, but not as though harmed. Relaxed, led from where he'd been into Dreamland, too dark to see his face but I knew it was relaxed, open & wordless, become now something he'd never been, or not in a long while.

I lay there trembling, unsure if it would last no matter how deep his sleep seemed. But he didn't move, not a muscle or an inch. I finally passed out from fear & stress & relief & the utter darkness in which I lay.

Woke suddenly nearly screamed but it was simply my time to get up & make the breakfast while they did early morning chores. That's how the day began, every day I was there. On Saturdays the four of them drove the old pickup to town for supplies. On Sunday they were somewhere on the farm but I was forbidden to ask or find out. Were there words said? I just knew.

And every night he intended to take me with no memory he'd been thwarted every other night. Did he think he already had? I don't think so. I was not seeded. I think more that when he shut out the lights & crawled into bed nude & hard & ready, a blankness engulfed him as I sang. A hole he did not know was there. At least for a long while.

The oldest was different from his papa, I think because his lust for me was simpler, purer. Didn't take him long to figure a reason to leave school early one day & get on home—

I'd considered him. I'll say that first. His body was young, like mine, & his cock would have been candy in me. So I was tempted. When I saw him coming home alone, I thought about it. I figured he had a method, & a reputation. I mulled & measured, & decided, no I'd have to do something.

He found himself on his papa's bed groping me. Unsure. Horny & unsure how this sexy little bit got the advantage.

"You want to fuck your daddy's piece. Nod."

He nodded. Unsure.

"And right here in his bed where I sleep at night."

More unsure. But nod.

"You can do me better."

Stare.

"Cum for me."

Heavy breath.

"Now."

He groaned in real pain as he orgasmed.

"Again."

Now tears.

"Again."

Now he was off the bed, crawling.

"Again."

He left the door open as he left.

I don't think he remembered that day too well. Just sidling up to me in the kitchen, hand inside my blouse. Crooning, "you . . . are . . . not . . . going . . . to . . . be . . . my . . . new . . . mama" I let his hand get a good squeeze of what I had, get hard down there, before I crooned back, "his bed."

The farmer smelled the jism in his bed that night but said nothing. Looking back now I wonder at the fuck of this all. He tried his turn at me & I crooned him to peaceful sleep.

It wasn't them that I wanted or could have had me easy. It was the scientist. His songs. I would get them in the mid-morning mail & save them till they were all out in the afternoon farming.

Took my long bath reading his letters. Let down my hair. Lit the candles. I read them aloud each & every one, sang them as he said, so I'd be ready that night—

I was young to the body's passions, it was new & wild & scary to me, & the farmer was never going to get what he wanted from me, I wasn't his dead wife, & he couldn't sustain what I needed, but this scientist, he got me, he *fucking got me*, & I knew I'd never know him, sitting every day in that hot bath,

candle lights in the shadows & cobwebs, the oldness of this farm, how it wasn't just a farm, & his letters were somehow teaching me this, how? I couldn't figure it. He was teaching me what else this place was via letters. He'd never been here.

How the farmer would move in close to me, always that gentle embrace, the warm breath, the cupping of my breast, the way my still body enflamed his, & I would sing as in that bath that afternoon

*The silence between each*
*is the freedom few remark*
*swathes of unfinished music,*
*rushes of light*

& his breathing would slow & his hands on me would relax, & the cock so hard & ready to slide into me one way or another, me being acquired & all, would limpen & crawl back into its slumbers.

I wouldn't stop there, wouldn't relax or sleep, no, those words burned & bruised me & I kept singing them, & more, over & over, bare in the farmer's bed, singing his words, cumming his words between my thighs, squeezing my breasts like I could make him feel if I hurt enough—

The farmer was getting close, he didn't know it, but I was singing as he was pushing himself in, as he was moaning *o baby how tight o cherry baby spread for me*, & I would be singing

*what's prettiest about regret*
*how it folds into new forms*

Moaning, pushing, my thighs open, if only you were the man wrote this song

*Each new blossom dipped into*
*in an old skin of gifts, hours,*
*what came, what didn't*

Pushing in, how is it wet, is it tight, does it fucking matter as long as it's here & spread, but the singing

*How the day feels now,*
*the way memories will*
*whore to keep life when*
*their lesson & loss have both*
*long wrinkled dry*

& I would let him slip out but toward the end he would sleep rock hard still, & this bothered me, wasn't fair, so I'd hum him softly into cumming, no words, I wasn't the scientist but I'd do it for him, feel it spill, all for me, all for me, all for me, & none—

She knew better, knew I could not sustain it all. Even the oldest boy was eyeing me again from a distance. Part of me possessed by the scientist from afar, the rest by the middle boy who'd not so much as kissed me but I knew, I'd taken spectral visits into his bed, into his dreams, it didn't seem strange to me, I was sleeping naked in a man's bed I'd not known long, I couldn't remember how I got there, he'd never kissed me but his looks so sweet & those nights when I filled his stomach till he could not breathe, stiffened him as he wouldn't groan, lead him near, & back, & near, & back, begging, & back, let it go, now all of it, there there, now lick it off, every drop, there, lick it good & smile—

I'd gone as deep into it as I could anyway, singing through room after room, there weren't this many rooms logically, lengthy, vast & vaster rooms, I sang & sang & more came & when was this & how, did it all come from those letters was I in my tub still crying out for you & why did I describe Maya when you asked what I looked like, that's what I can't figure out, I can't trace it one way & another will you help me Kinley now, will you help me? *Will you fucking help me?*

I wake, I think. Kinley has me in a kind of body lock but it's to protect me.
"A part of me is still there."
"Yes. I know."
"She buried that place, Kinley, she *eviscerated* it. But I'm there. A part of me. He's keeping me there."
"The farmer?"
"Fuck no!"
"The boy? The oldest."
"Kinley. What the fuck."
"The scientist."
"Yes, Kinley."
"Why, Christina? He protected you. He loves you."
"He's still protecting me. He will still loves me."
"What then?"
"I don't know. But there's a part of me that's there. That hasn't left."
"Will I lose you to him if we go?"
Here, Christina just laughs in Kinley's face. It was her "fucking blind stupid dumbass lovely Kinley my Kinley" laugh, more or less. He took what comfort he could as they were dressing to go.

*To be continued in* Cenacle | *82* | *October 2012*

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# *Within's Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution*

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*Tom Sheehan*

**Once Upon a Timely Moment**

Apprehensive, she pushed open the door to take a final look, to check the Earth as far as she could see, to measure, to see if the gods she held were less than perfect. This was her world. The terror she found was in the measurement, in the time she had spent exploring dividend possibilities, the market's surge, a late movie thought more boisterous than life itself, someone's divorce, chicanery and outright theft, and a rigged election all too soon winked at. It came at her, the swift thought: our feet are caught in place: we are sucked into loam and hardpan and left for all of this rock; we are locked up tighter than the grip of stable Earth's 17-degree axis. Escape is not here, or atonement for us. She kept saying "we," kept herself aligned in that rare and human confederacy. There was assessment and agreement not known about; at that moment, in one half-held breath, hoe in hand, eyes gone to marble, a gaunt Filipino suddenly apprehends a minor shift in the Earth's crust. It is the awed way she would know a tilt at a pinball machine. Beyond him, her, momentous Krakatoa, an island yet, proves to be imaginative again at the foot of history, and is no longer breathless. And deeper yet, farther away, thought to be buried out there in the fluffed accountabilities of Time, one long horse-tailed, red-eyed, incommutable comet picks up a little bit of left hand English . . . just for the hell of it.

* * *

**Carom**

Eddie Smiledge
was the house man,
racked the balls,
collected coin,
was a judge
when hundred dollar bills
hit the side pocket.

He smoked cigars
cue stick thick,
ate Baby Ruths
until his teeth stuck,
sent us home abruptly
when midnight slipped
like a footpad
over the green felt
on Table No. 4.

He did not lend us
money, but let the clock
work in our favor;
at a nickel a game
he didn't see the eight
ball eight times
in the side pocket,
and forgot to lock away
the potato chips in nickel bags.

One night in `50 we played
One–Ball–In–The–Side
Pocket past closing
and Eddie sat in a comer
waving off the game costs.
We walked off under
a September moon
all the way to Korea.

The night I came back,
chevrons up and down,
deep new wrinkles
struck across my face,
reaching for my yesteryear,
a skinny bald–headed man
was racking the balls.
He didn't know my name,
who was home and who wasn't,
why Eddie Smiledge had drifted off
someplace the day after we left.

* * *

**Cutting Ice on Rapid Tucker's Pond**

It was always horses, dragging ice
to the wooden ramp obeying chugs
of the gasoline engine, their traces
often slack as the ice slid on ice
and thundered slowly and resolutely
from hard shore to hard shore. Up the
ramp the ice cakes lumbered, six feet
of Arctic beauty before the huge saw
found the blue and silver-red signals
sitting just under cover and waiting
to flash once more before sawdust
poured down on their frantic coloring.

I have no hard memory of the men
who steamed their labors on the hard pond,
who swore and drank coffee from bottles
whiskey belonged in, who went gloveless
and carefree and irreverent to winter.
Of their faces I have no memory, or names,
or how they spent their money downtown,
or where they trod for stitches when
the angry saw went haywire. I only know
they poled ice floes and huge cakes
with an indifferent touch, that they argued
long hours against the cold, the wind,
and the incessant need and desperate need
for sleep, that at zero degrees they mopped
brows with red kerchiefs large as sails.

They were the reverse itinerants
who came not for fruit but for ice drop,
who appeared one Saturday in December
and began to take away pieces of our pond,
huge rectangular chunks they hitched
up to horses shrouded wholly in steam,
their wide mouths rimmed by thick lips
often white with frost around the red tongues.
They wore soft felt hats, brimmed, jackets
so odd you could not find a mate, but boots
with horsehide laces, wide belts, and looked
westward where the sun would set part ways
through the afternoon.

In latest July, ever,
you could find December deep in the icehouse
under the waves of orange sawdust still wet
with some of their sweat, a cool hideaway
to puff the stub of a cigarette, touch a breast,
play hide and seek for hours as winter
sprawled under our feet cold and foreboding
and nearly two floors high inside redan walls
two feet thick.

Mostly I remember the eyes
of a horse who plunged through the ice,
like great dishes of fear, wide and frightened
and full of the utmost knowledge. His front
hooves slashed away at the ragged rim of ice,
but could not lift him out, or leather traces
or ropes or sixty feet of chain, and when he
went down, like a boat plunging, huge bubbles
burst on the surface and a December afternoon
became quiet.

We stood transfixed, as if frozen
in the gray of that day, the itinerant workers,
other horses at rest, my shod friends, as Rapid
Tucker's Pond began its disappearance under
the edge of yesterday.

* * *

**Blue Lightning and a '33 Ford Touring Car**

The old Ford presented itself
one Lover's Lane afternoon
as we cut through
No-Man's land,

stripped mostly of goods, the top
devious as umbrella in two winds,
canvas streamers lounging
stiff as subway straps.

We pledged its deliverance, recall,
and butt-worked half a daylight
hiding it under dim alders
along pond's cozy bank.

For weeks we scrounged odd parts,
plugs, wires, battery, gas in
pint cans, even a shod wheel
off Goldberg's junk wagon

parked outside Widow Minn's house,
a stringy threaded fan belt
donated by my unauthorizing
brother, ignition parts

from a grown confidant; until,
at the end, it seems,
of one glorious summer, it
stood spit and polished,

apt-looking, our road warrior,
corsair of the hot macadam,
ready for the breakdown cruise,
poised at catapult.

We marveled at its false gleam,
like the dawn before it's dawn,
the not so taut canvas top
nailed to wooden ribs,

lines in the algae green paint
as if topographically applied,
the grill fashionable once
again, high noon silvering.

That old workhorse of an engine,
of course, never turned over,
never coughed once at prompting,
mute as an Inca in Mexico.

We could not fathom dark rains
swallowed by empty plug holes,
how its mystical alloys
and metals self-fused

tighter than a two-handed fist.
So one Saturday of October,
the bite beginning in air,
Earth rolling out sleep

blankets, we interred it with rites
under the ways of Lily Pond,
let it slip off the edge
like summer moves,

sleek, our dread Phaeton underway,
wearing weeks of polish, inept-
ness, a piece of each of us
at summer, at dreams

gone their ways, off and out and up,
sad for all the eye burn sweating,
sadder still when I wander here
under stars, pinned by light.

Once, in a foreign April, thermals
at great discord, a blue light
sank beneath the pond's face
and froze on a soft chassis.

* * * * * *

*Sarah Seltzer*

# 5 Fascinating New Uses For Psychedelics

**[Essay]**

*(Published April 26, 2012 at Alternet.org: http://tinyurl.com/c86g2ec)*

On a recent episode of the television drama *Mad Men*, set in 1966, Roger Sterling, the embodiment of the classic old-boys club figure, accompanies his younger wife to a dinner party where the guests "turn on" to LSD. After a night of laughing fits, tears, dancing, and hallucinations, the couple have a profound conversation about their marriage's failure. Sterling wakes up the next morning feeling that he's been given an entry into "the truth" and, in a shockingly sincere tone, declares that it's going "to be a beautiful day."

The sequence represents a surprisingly positive portrayal of acid, staying away from clichés and demonstrating how a stuck-inthe-mud character might actually, at least temporarily, be jolted out of despair and complacency by an experience on drugs.

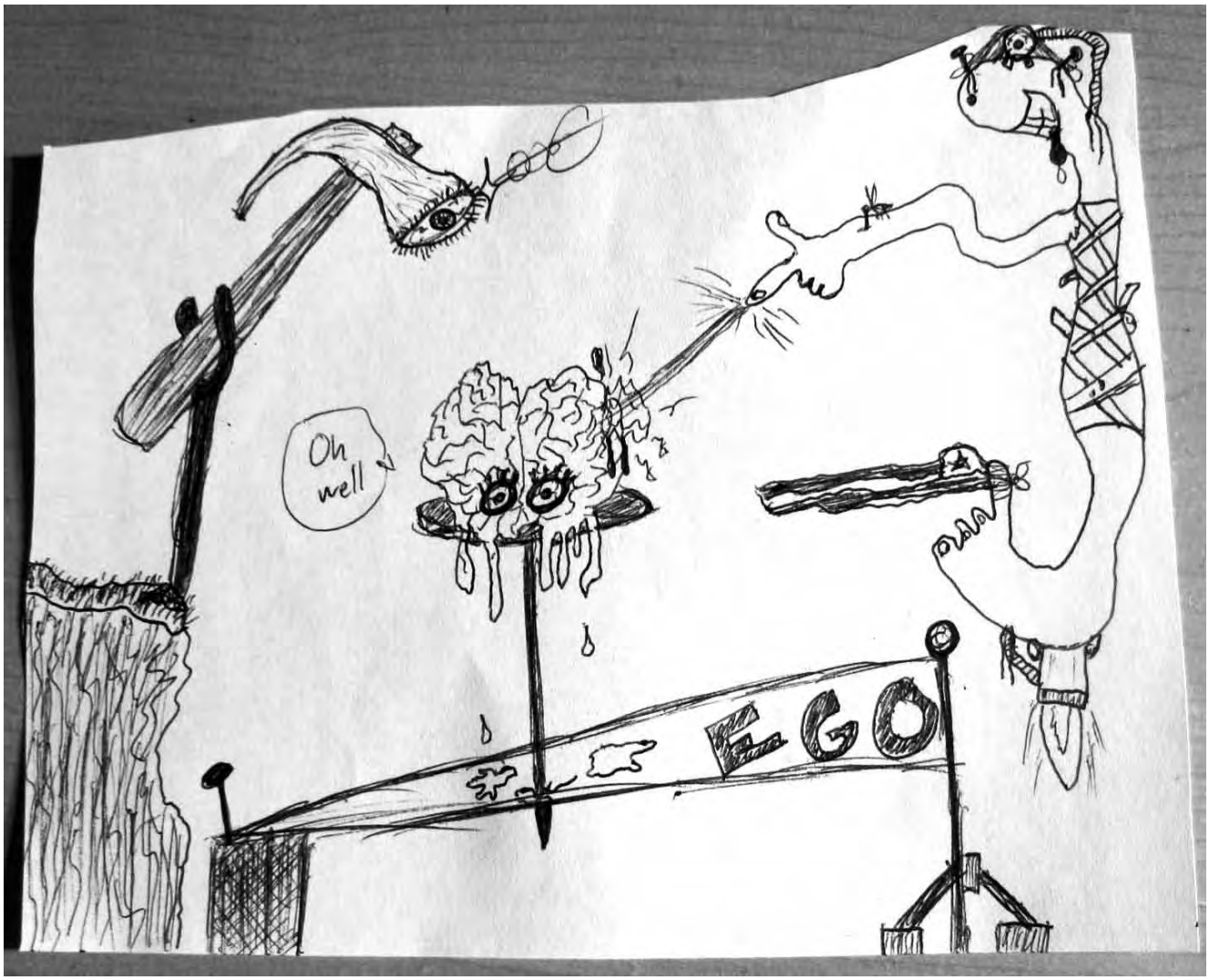
In some ways, Roger's fictional night embodies the quintessential mid-'60s "long, strange, trip." For a brief period before LSD became synonymous with the youth-led counterculture, it was taken seriously among elites—it was even legal. The drug, originally being tested for various physical and psychological institutions, began to be recreationally used by professionals—like the therapist who encourages the Sterlings to "turn on"—as a method for aiding personal development and enhancing insight.

But when LSD became a street drug and was criminalized, it moved out of laboratories, and the stigma carried over through the end of the century. Psychedelics like LSD and psilocybin were added to the 1970 Controlled Substance Act as Schedule I substances—which defines them *as "having no medicinal value"*—and makes getting federal funding (or the actual drugs necessary) for research nearly impossible. That is why, even now, many studies of marijuana and psychedelics are conducted in other countries. Scientists may have wanted to conduct the research, but they couldn't and, for the most part, it's still very difficult.

It's taken decades for American scientists, doctors, and patients to have the chance to take a closer look at the uses of psychedelic drugs, not just recreational but medical, personal and therapeutic.

And yet the shift has happened. The profession is back to exploring the various positive effects of these drugs, and their work is being covered by the mainstream media. Here are some examples of ways psychedelics are being explored in medicine today:

**1. Alcoholism.** This year, a group of Norwegian scientists went back into medical archives to reexamine previous LSD studies to help recovering alcoholics. When they crunched the data, what they found was not only evidence that LSD is useful in treating addiction, but also circumstantial evidence that the culture wars may have derailed the progress of this line of inquiry. From *HealthDay*'s story in March:




**Baylen Greever**

> *In a new analysis, Norwegian researchers examined six studies of LSD and alcoholism that were conducted in the United States and Canada between 1966 and 1970. The analysis of data from the 536 patients in the studies showed that a single dose of LSD helped heavy alcoholics quit and reduced their risk of resuming drinking, according to the meta-analysis appearing online March 8 in the* Journal of Psychopharmacology.
>
> *Patients who received a full dose of the controversial drug did the best. On average, 59 percent of those patients showed a clear improvement, compared with 38 percent of patients in other groups, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology researchers said.*

Kristen Gwynne has pointed out on AlterNet that this study is particularly promising as there are currently very limited options for those who suffer from alcoholism, and 12-step programs, which rely on a loosely religious framework, can be discriminatory and leave people out.

The implications of these studies are huge. As the authors said, "Given the evidence for a beneficial effect of LSD on alcoholism, it is puzzling why this treatment approach has been largely overlooked." In fact, the kind of radical new perspective portrayed on *Mad Men* is the kind of jolt that could help break the hold of the disease.

**2. End-of-life issues.** That change in perspective may also help those who are dying or at risk of dying, and in the throes of psychological crisis. The *New York Times Magazine* recently ran a comprehensive cover story by Lauren Slater describing new trials for patients suffering from terminal or severe disease, and the attendant anxieties.

One patient profiled in the story had a profound emotional catharsis during her controlled use of psilocybin, and described it for posterity on video:

> *"I felt this lump of emotions welling up . . . almost like an entity," Sakuda said, as she spoke straight into the camera. "I started to cry . . . . Everything was concentrated and came welling up and then . . . it started to dissipate, and I started to look at it differently . . . . I began to realize that all of this negative fear and guilt was such a hindrance . . . to making the most of and enjoying the healthy time that I'm having." Sakuda went on to explain that, under the influence of the psilocybin, she came to a very visceral understanding that there was a present, a now, and that it was hers to have.*

Slater's piece contains other compelling personal anecdotes from deeply ill patients, taking part in similar or parallel studies. After the directed, controlled administration of psychedelics, their fear of death decreased, their feeling of transcendence increased. Most importantly, their anxiety was lessened, an alteration which positively affected their health and well-being.

**3. Depression and anxiety.** Slater's *Times* story also begins to dig into the physical reasons that psychedelics might have this effect—they may shut down over-active regions of the brain that are associated with depression:

> *The researchers found that the states of "unrestrained consciousness" that accompany the ingestion of psilocybin are associated with a deactivation of regions of the brain that integrate our senses and our perception of self. In depressed people, Nutt explains, one of those regions, the anterior cingulate cortex, is overactive, and psilocybin may work to shut it down. Nutt is planning a*

> *study in which he will give psilocybin to individuals with treatment resistant depression and see whether the drug can ease some of depression's most recalcitrant symptoms.*

That such an experiment would take place is logical; it seems evident that given the indications for these drugs' interaction with the depression and anxiety faced by terminal patients, they might also help those suffering from anxiety at other phases of life.

**4. Cluster headaches.** One interesting, more physical indication for these drugs-which arises from their non-psychedelic properties--is for the treatment of cluster headaches, which some call "suicide headaches" due to their extremely painful, frequent nature.

In 2009, the *Daily Beast* wrote about Bob Wold, a cluster headache sufferer, and the first time he took magic mushrooms (psilocybin):

> *The psychedelics arrived in a brown box at his doorstep from a long-distance dealer. He took one dose: about 1.5 grams. "In 15 minutes I could feel the difference," he says. "My head was clearer than it had probably been in the past 20 years. Other medications felt like they were just covering it up . . . All the pressure was gone."*

Wold decided to help fund research into the uses of psychedelics on headaches like his:

> *Cluster Busters, a nonprofit advocacy group co-founded by Wold, is funding research by Harvard's Dr. John Halpern, who recently administered a modified LSD molecule to a handful of cluster patients, successfully ending most of their headache cycles for weeks or months. Halpern thinks they may have finally found the cure for an ailment that has mystified physicians for years, and hopes to run a larger clinical trial soon.*

**5. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).** MDMA, known more commonly as Ecstasy, has been studied recently to treat a specific form of depression and anxiety: that associated with past trauma. *Oprah Magazine* profiled several women who had been abused or raped and underwent experimental MDMA therapy. Their reactions were varied, but mostly positive. Here's one:

> *"I used to think,* I'm a broken person. I'll never be able to do this simple thing. *But after my first session, I thought,* Well, it's okay not to stand in line. It's okay to go early. *I stopped judging myself, and I didn't avoid my life anymore. Which was wonderful." A quarter-century after taking MDMA, Ot'alora still gets triggered from time to time, particularly in crowded places. "But it's much more short-lived now," she says. "Sometimes it's a matter of a second before I bring my body back to a safe zone."*

Here's another:

> *In 2008 Emily did a single session of MDMA with the guidance of an underground therapist. "I took myself through the rape and I felt the trauma deeply, but I also stepped outside of it," she says. "I had what they call the 'God view' in a computer game. I saw it objectively, and with compassion. I wasn't thinking,* I shouldn't have been there or I'm a piece of crap *or* This is

all my fault."

The *Los Angeles Times* reported on a study being run by clinical investigator and psychiatrist Michael Mithoefer of South Carolina, the man who conducted the most recent round of MDMA therapy experiments:

> *Mithoefer has received FDA permission to test whether Ecstasy can help Iraq and Afghanistan veterans overcome their PTSD when used during psychotherapy sessions; six veterans have enrolled in the study. In an earlier clinical trial, Ecstasy helped 10 of 12 women recover from PTSD stemming from child sexual trauma. Only 2 out of 8 women who took a placebo had similar results, Mithoefer reported last year in the* Journal of Psychopharmacology.

With MDMA as well as with mushrooms and LSD, the commonly known effects of the drug when it's taken for recreational use can be seen, in a more targeted fashion, in the way the drug is used to combat particular psychological conditions:

> *Ecstasy's reputation for enhancing trust has clear roots in its biological effect. Using brain scans, Columbia University psychologist Gillinder Bedi found that subjects who took MDMA showed heightened activity in a brain region associated with processing rewards and depressed activity in the amygdala—a source of fear reactions. In animals, MDMA boosts the hormone oxytocin, which promotes trust, sociability and interpersonal attachment.*

The politics of testing and studying the positive medical effects of psychedelics are marked by the politics of the drug war, the culture war, the pharmaceutical industries and academia. There may be no interest from Big Pharma to lobby the government for these studies because of the lack of profit potential; these drugs are something you take once or twice, not daily, and they are not patented.

But as all these stories in the mainstream media show, the therapeutic uses of these substances may finally be getting the kind of measured, rational attention they deserve--without the handwringing that comes from past negative associations. At least we can hope.

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Scriptor Press is an independent press founded in 1995 in Cambridge, MA. Scriptor Press publishes the quarterly literary magazine *The Cenacle*; the *RaiBooks* literary chapbooks series; & an annual *Sampler* of selected works. It also hosts the quarterly meetings of the Jellicle Literary Guild.

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# Notes on Contributors

**Charlie Beyer** lives in Oreana, Idaho. His *A Travel to Belize* narrative concludes in this issue, but it looks like there might be a few additional tales from his time down there, coming to *The Cenacle* anon. More of his writings can be found at http://therubyeye.blogspot.com.

**Joe Coleman** lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. I met him at the Out Loud Open Mic event (run by long-time *Cenacle* contributors Ric Amante & Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor; http://www.outloudopenmike.com), & was impressed by his writing, his on-stage banter, & his good spirit. Welcome to the pages of *The Cenacle*, Joe!

**Philip K. Dick** was born in Chicago in 1928, and died in California in 1982. His novel *VALIS* stands as one of the greatest of the 20th century. His great short story in this issue was also re-published by Scriptor Press in 2005 as part of the Burning Man Books Series.

**Baylen Greever** lives in Mons, Belgium. His artwork in this issue marks his first appearance in *The Cenacle*. A man of books & plants, & a DJ on SpiritPlants Radio, he is one I greatly enjoy engaging in long chats in cyberspace. More of his work can be found at: http://botanicalb.blogspot.be.

**Judh Haggai** lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. More of her work can be found at: http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams. I find reading her haiku to be one of my happiest occasional events.

**Nathan D. Horowitz** lives in Vienna, Austria. His excellent poetry previously appeared in *Cenacle* | 80 | April 2012. Like Baylen above, he DJs a show for SpiritPlants Radio. More of his writing & music can be found at: http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz and http://lordarbor.bandcamp.com.

**Jeremy Kilar** lives in Oak Ridge, New Jersey. His photography last appeared in *Cenacle* | 79 | October 2011. He *also* DJs on SpiritPlants Radio. All manner of his projects & schemes can be found at: http://catfishrivers.com.

**Martina Newberry** lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. More of her work can be found at: http://rollwiththechanges.org. Like Judih in Israel, Martina is a dear distant sister to me.

**Sarah Seltzer** lives in New York City. She is an associate editor at AlterNet, and a freelance writer. More of her work can be found at: http://sarahseltzer.com.

**Tom Sheehan** lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Like Joe Coleman, he is a friend I met through the Out Loud Open Mic. Dove-tailings, dove-tailings . . .

**Kassandra Soulard** lives in Arlington, Massachusetts, & loves me no matter my current state of high or crumble. Her gift of love for me is part of why I edit this journal & share with you.

**Raymond Soulard, Jr.** lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. Newly jobless, another summer on the bricks, & on the dole, & yet my black pen still moves, & so I glide through the peaks & the mud, each, & both, with melodies of hope a'clinging to my soul . . .

* * * * * *

Stay Hungry
Stay Foolish

CONEY
ISLAND
HOT
DOGS
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